

MARBARA MORRISON

{ CHENIERE }  
FILLER

MRS. FREDERICK CRANE





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CHINK-FILLER





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*A Story for Girls*

BY

MRS. FREDERICK CRANE



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*To*

“LITTLE COMRADES,” LOUISE AND ALICE  
WHO CONSTANTLY FILLED SO MANY CHINKS FOR HER  
WITH COMFORT AND CHEER  
THIS STORY IS DEDICATED BY A  
LOVING AND GRATEFUL  
“GRANDMA-AUNTIE”

Forbid that we should make complaints  
If unto us should come the call  
To reach the stature of Thy saints  
Through services obscure and small.

Since it was Thou Thyself began  
Thy great salvation for us all,  
By sending forth the Son of man  
A helpless Babe, obscure and small.





# BARBARA MORRISON

## CHINK-FILLER

### CHAPTER I

#### THE PRECIOUS PROBLEM

THE room still vibrated with the slamming of the door.

"Mother," said Susie, and her usually gentle voice almost trembled with indignation, "I really think you are too lenient with Barbara."

"Yes," joined in Amy, an unwonted fire in her beautiful eyes, "she was simply outrageous! Beyond all bounds! I can't help it, mother, I could hardly keep from slapping her!"

Laura, with frowning brow, stood holding a torn piece of music in her hand, and said:

"Well, I *did* slap her, and richly she deserved it! Now, mother, this has *got* to be decided one way or other. If I am to go on giving her music lessons, she must do as I tell her. If, because I insist on her practising a certain exercise, she is free to fly into a rage, and snatch it out of my hand and tear it across, that ends it. I *won't* go on!"

Mrs. Morrison, altogether the calmest of the group, looked around on her three daughters.

"You are all right enough in what you say, and, Laura, you were quite justified in slapping her, though

I am not so sure that it was wisely done or will secure the best results."

"She won't tear my music again, that I know," answered Laura confidently. "She really looked scared."

Mrs. Morrison continued:

"I shall tell her she must pay for it out of her pocket-money."

"And I shall tell her that I will on no account take her money. I paid myself in the coin I preferred when I slapped her. The loss of the music was the least part of it all—nothing as compared with the abominableness of her conduct." Her mother nodded assent, and Laura went on: "I am not boasting, mother, but you know yourself that it is I who am doing the favor in giving her lessons, and it wouldn't be a bit easy even if she behaved herself, for she hasn't any natural aptitude for music; but when she treats me as if I were a persecutor and she were putting me under obligations by even consenting to be taught, it is—it is——"

"Maddening," suggested Amy.

"It is true," said Laura, "it makes me 'hopping mad,' as the children say, if that is what you mean, Amy, by being 'maddening.' Now, mother, what is to be done?"

"Girls," answered Mrs. Morrison to all three, "I feel that you are not taking a broad enough view; perhaps I should rather say a long enough view of this matter. It is more in relation to Barbara's future that I am considering and handling her stormy present. You will remember that Barbara always was from her infancy a tempestuous young creature."

"Goodness!" said Amy, "can I ever forget how



she used to scare me stiff by holding her breath until she was black in the face when she was in an infantile rage. And the clever mite found out quickly enough that I would do anything for her rather than have her get into one of those fits."

Mrs. Morrison continued: "For two years now, indeed ever since your father and I returned from Europe, Babs has been a puzzle to us both. We call her our precious problem. It began when she joined the church and the difficulties were with her wild remorse and fears; but since then I have seen that more and more she has drawn away from us all, and taken an antagonistic stand. She complains that you girls care nothing for her and shun her society. She is not far wrong in the complaint." Each of her daughters started to speak, but she held up her hand. "Hear me out, girls. I am not blaming you at all. I know perfectly well that you have tried until you consider further trying useless, and naturally you have lost interest in efforts which landed you nowhere. I am right, am I not?"

"Yes, mother, you are," Susie answered for them all. "And you are the dear you always are to read us so justly."

"Well, then, girls, be convinced that I also read her justly, and that I am no more lenient than the case requires. I *must* sacrifice everything else for the all-important purposes of retaining her belief in my sympathetic love for her during this difficult period of ferment and transition. All I ask of you girls is to pray for her, love her at least a little, and hold yourselves ready to meet any favorable turn in her moods."

"You are such a blessing, mother," responded

Laura; "I certainly ought to be able to do more than you ask, for I verily believe I should have developed just like Babs if you had not guided me so wisely. Indeed, but for you I fear I should often break loose even nowadays, when I am supposed to have cut my own wisdom teeth."

"I always have felt," Mrs. Morrison went on, "that that year I was away with your father, Barbara contracted some sort of a twist in her character—at least in the manifestation of it. She has by nature many peculiarities, but I thought she was learning to control their outbreak quite creditably." Here the lady sighed. "It did seem unfortunate that she had to be left that entire year alone with your poor aunt Barbara, who had no more idea how to manage her than a kitten.

"But with you three in college, it couldn't be helped; for go I had to. Your father would have died if he had remained here, and equally if he had gone alone; and of course it was not practicable for one of you to be left in charge." She sighed again. "I do very much wish, though, that I knew of some outside, inspiring influence that might give her mind a new direction. She has sunk so deep in morbid brooding these days that familiar home influences do not reach her."

"I have it!" cried Susie. "She is one of the King's Daughters, and the annual rally is next week at Bridgeton, and that Mrs. Barton, whom they say every girl adores, is to make the address. We three were mourning because we had made other engagements before we knew of it; but Babs simply *must* go. It is said that Mrs. Barton has a way that no girl can resist, or even wants to resist. Some one told me:

'It's her way more than her say that steals the girls' hearts.' "

Her mother brightened. "I am glad you suggested that, Susie; I shall certainly try having her go. Pray for the success of the experiment upon our precious problem, daughters, and see how happy you will be when she becomes at last our precious pride." And she smiled on the subdued group as she left the room.

"Mother is right about Aunt Barbara; she did a lot toward spoiling Babs. From babyhood the child wound her around her fingers."

"That wasn't the worst of it, Susie," said Laura. "It seems a dreadful thing to say now that poor, dear auntie is gone; but she had a quick temper too, you know, and used to dispute with Babs, and that ended her being able to control her. And then, too, when Babs found that auntie dreaded her stinging remarks about that disastrous love-affair, she did with auntie just what she did with you, Amy, by holding her breath."

"Yes," answered Amy, "I remember how she would make auntie cry. It is really pathetic, though, to see how careful poor mother is in what she says of Babs's faults. To her they are only 'peculiarities.' Though at times I am sure mother is nearly distracted. The truth is, Barbara is the most selfish, cantankerous, suspicious, jealous, and insolent of youngsters. There, I feel better for having said it; I feel nearly as satisfied as if I really had slapped her."

Here the "youngster" under discussion walked in and slammed some money onto the table, saying: "Mother said I had to pay you for that music, Laura, so now we are quits."



As she turned to leave, her sister held her and said:

"No, we are not quits on the value of the music, because I shall not accept your payment for it."

Barbara put her hands behind her defiantly: "You can't force me to take it back."

"I shan't try. There it goes into mother's poor-box. And now, childie, listen to me. I consider that I punished your conduct as it deserved, and that is all I really cared about. And you might as well understand here and now that I do not intend to lose my temper again no matter what you do. But that, all the same, I shall certainly slap you, and slap you *hard*, every time you indulge in an outbreak while I am teaching you."

"Suppose I won't take any more of your old lessons," sneered Barbara.

"That," returned Laura calmly, "is just as you can arrange it with father. He was the one who asked me to give you lessons, and I fancy he intends you to take them whether you want to or not. Personally, I should find it a great relief if you gave them up."

"Then I won't give them up."

Laura laughed good-humoredly. "What a contrary puss it is!" she said.

"Barbara," said Amy, whose indignation was still not wholly allayed, "if mother wasn't so easy with you, I wonder if you wouldn't be better."

"I confess," added Susie in her quiet tones, "I for one should like to see the extreme rigor of the law applied. I just wonder how it would work."

Again the room vibrated with the slamming of the door.

## CHAPTER II

### WHAT BARBARA HEARD AT THE RALLY, AND WHAT SHE HEARD AFTER THE RALLY

“**B**ARBARA, you will miss your train if you don’t hurry!” called a voice from down-stairs.

“Oh, mother,” called back Barbara fretfully, “have I *got* to go?”

“Is it really necessary to thrash that all out again?” her mother asked in a tone of weary impatience. “You know as well as I do that the other girls can’t go—Susie is at her history lecture, Laura is at the church-concert rehearsal, and Amy is at the dress-maker’s.”

“But I don’t see,” persisted Barbara, “why I should have to go to the old rally just because the girls can’t—or think they can’t,” she added to herself spitefully. “I don’t see the harm of my staying away too!”

“Well, I do,” answered her mother decisively. “So come down at once.”

Barbara flung her book onto the bed, jammed on her hat, and, seizing jacket and gloves, hastened down-stairs, where her mother stood holding the money for her car-fare.

“Now, Barbara,” said she kindly, “do try to muster up a smile. I am sure you will enjoy it, after all.”

"Well, I am sure I won't; and I don't see why I can't be allowed to do the things I like as well as the others. They stay or go as they please, and I have to do all the horrid old things they wriggle out of!"

She flung herself out of the house, ignoring her mother's look of mingled distress and displeasure. As she appeared at the station, a group of merry girls exclaimed:

"Here comes Barbara Morrison!"

"Looking as cross as a bear!" added one.

"Hello, Babs," called another. "What's the matter?"

"Matter enough! I don't want to go to the old rally of the King's Daughters, and I have to; and just when I was reading the best story yet!"

Here they had to board their train; but as they clustered together in the end of the car, one said:

"I'll bet you anything, Babs, that you'll be glad you came. Mrs. Barton, of Boston, is to give the address, and she is de-li-cious!"

"The sweetest darling!" cried another.

"A perfect peach!" added a third.

"Simply adorable!" confirmed a fourth.

Barbara's lips took on a curve of utmost scorn as she retorted: "These sweet, darling, adorable, delicious peaches of women who go about with their pious St. Catherine look"—and Barbara rolled up her eyes—"giving sugar-taffy advice to girls are the limit; and I'm sure I shall find your Mrs. Barton, of Boston, de-test-able!"

The girls exchanged indignant glances, and one voiced her feelings: "Barbara Morrison, you talk like an old spitting tabby-cat!"



This made all but Barbara laugh. She replied with glum dignity: "Mary Ann Peters, if you don't like my conversation, you're not obliged to listen to it!"

Another girl, standing in amused silence, interposed:

"There's one thing I will say for you, Babs, you're as honest as they make them; so I want you to promise that if, after all, you do like Mrs. Barton, you'll 'fess up to us."

"I'll do about that, Grace Alden, just as I please!" snapped Barbara.

"Why didn't you say as you *darned* please?" gibed Mary Ann Peters. "It would just suit your pious St. Catherine expression, you delicious, adorable peach of a girl!"

Here Mary Ann was pushed into a seat by her companions and ordered to "behave"; and one of them, in the interests of peace, changed the subject by asking Barbara on what committees she intended serving, but was shortly answered: "None."

So they left her to herself, and she sat out the remainder of the ride in gloomy silence, and in gloomy silence trailed behind the others to the place of meeting; where among the crowd of sunny, smiling girl faces hers glowered conspicuously.

When Mrs. Barton, of Boston, arose to speak, and the audience enthusiastically gave the Chautauqua salute, Barbara's grudging participation was almost as marked as if she had refrained altogether. But her determination not to become interested soon weakened under Mrs. Barton's sympathetic voicing of girlish perplexities and aspirations; and her clear and practical suggestions for solving the former and fulfilling the latter, though her discontent deepened

with her interest. Nothing that was said seemed to fit her individual case, and she scowled impatiently.

Suddenly Mrs. Barton paused, looked the assembly over thoughtfully, and then flashed into Barbara's eyes a smile that was as personal as if she had called her by name. It was only for an instant, but the unexpectedness of it made the girl catch her breath and redouble her attention.

"Let us get to fundamentals," continued Mrs. Barton. "There exists a talent which is the most important a girl can possess. In fact, it is by itself an endowment; and, though it includes neither organizing nor administrative ability, more than any other it has power to hold society together. It differs from all other talents in this important respect, that it can be acquired by every one, and probably with less effort than is given to following the fashions. And yet it is a talent not greatly prized by its possessors, although to others it is their chief attraction."

The girls were listening in smiling curiosity, but the gloom on Barbara's face said as plainly as words: "Of course I'm not 'in it'!" Then she started and leaned forward, for Mrs. Barton, stepping to the edge of the platform, looked directly into her eyes as she continued:

"This crowning power and grace of life which every individual of you either does or may possess, but which hardly a handful of you covet, is the talent for making people happy."

There was a gasp of surprise followed by a distinct letting down of interest in her audience.

"Just as I anticipated," she said laughingly. "But let me illustrate my point. I know of a fine monu-



ment, built of great blocks of granite, which was in danger of ruin because bits of mortar had dropped out here and there leaving open chinks. If rain had filled these and then frozen, it would have forced the solid blocks apart. Therefore, however much the mortar used in repairing might despise its office of chink-filler, it really was the monument's preserver. Just as serving others holds society together, by shutting out the ruinous forces of mere self-seeking.

"So, girls, to be a social chink-filler is no mean vocation for any of us; nor is it an easy one. It is never easy to accept all the poorer portions and places so that others may be made happy by the best; to smile when you feel like snarling; to efface yourself in humble services; in short, to fill chinks when you long to build palaces.

"But let a girl undertake with her whole heart to become a master-hand at this vocation, and she will soon discover that it is as stimulating as basket-ball, and far more absorbing than bridge-whist. To push the button that brings smiles to tearful faces and happiness to lonely hearts is even worth the sacrifice of being out of sight behind the machine. It means walking in the footsteps of Him who came in the form of a servant, 'to comfort all that mourn—to give them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.' "

What more Mrs. Barton said Barbara hardly knew; she was too busy speculating whether she could master this vocation. When the meeting broke up she hurried to the station, and slipped into a seat behind the open door of the waiting-room to think it out. She hardly heard the chatter and laughter as the other girls

gathered on the platform outside; nor was she aware of the two ladies who entered hastily and seated themselves on the other side of the open doorway.

"There!" exclaimed one softly. "We did get in undiscovered. Those girls are dears, but I was starving for a few minutes alone with you. I can't begin to tell you, Nettie, how much your talk meant to me! I was so glad, too, that you said what you did about making others happy, for girls are apt to forget its importance in their keenness to do big things; but I was surprised, too, for it did not seem to fit in with what you were saying just before."

The other laughed. "You are right, Florence, it didn't fit in at all. It was spoken on the spur of the moment. Three seats from the front sat a girl who would have been pretty but for her discontented, peevish expression. She was a most unresponsive listener; and I suddenly felt that I *must* reach the poor child. It was pathetic that any girl could look so disgruntled with life when everything about her indicated that she came from a prosperous home. I wonder if by any chance you know her? She wore a particularly natty suit of blue with red facings, and a blue velvet hat with a chic bow of red ribbon."

The lady's voice had risen to a conversational tone, and as she uttered the last words a familiar note in it disturbed Barbara's revery with the knowledge that Mrs. Barton was speaking.

"Oh, yes," answered the other lady, and Barbara recognized the voice of Mrs. Gerald, her former Sunday-school teacher. "That was Barbara Morrison."

Barbara started to reveal herself, but shrank as the speaker added:

“And, frankly, she is the most disagreeable girl I know.”

The involuntary listener could not now bring herself to make her presence known, and therefore, much as she tried not to eavesdrop, could not help hearing what followed.

“She used to be in my Sunday-school class, and I had to ask to have her changed to another.”

Barbara had always resented this transfer, though not suspecting the reason for it, and she could hardly control her distress and anger as the voice continued.

“It was a real trial to me to do it. Oh, how I had prayed for that girl! And how I tried and hoped to win her! But whenever spiritual matters came up seriously, and the girls began to express themselves, she made mocking, cynical remarks that spoiled everything. I have wondered since whether I ought to have kept her a bit longer; even though she was thwarting all my efforts for the others as well as for herself. You, Nettie, would have managed better. Tell me, was I utterly derelict?”

“Oh, Florence,” laughed the other, “you are taking it too seriously. Of course you had to consider the good of the greater number. Besides, if she was a misfit in your class it was better also for her to go into another. How does she get on now?”

“I fear not at all. She has been shifted from class to class.”

“Is she the proverbial only child?”

“No, indeed; she has three sisters and a brother all considerably older than herself. Her three sisters are quite remarkable; all so handsome, and so pleasant in their ways that they are immensely popular. Be-



sides, the oldest is a brilliant student, and the next one almost a musical genius, while Amy, next older than Barbara, is such a beauty that she would be an ornament to society if she never opened her lips. Barbara is simply a nonentity beside her sisters."

"Poor girl," said Mrs. Barton. "How discouraging to be so overshadowed."

"Yes, I judge she resents it bitterly, and makes a personal grievance of it. Barbara has fair enough mental ability, and as you saw isn't bad-looking. She could easily hold her own in an ordinary family. For that matter, she could as it is but for her ungracious manners. She seems determined to go through life with a chip on her shoulder. It is a very disheartening case; such a needless manufacturing of unhappiness for herself and every one about her."

"What sort of parents has she?"

"The best possible; devoted to the interests of their children, and with very high ideals."

"Then you consider that nothing can be said for her in extenuation or excuse?"

"No, I think it should be taken into account that she is greatly handicapped by a morbid nature and a suspicious, jealous disposition; and I do feel sorry for her. Still, all that is no excuse for blighting the happiness of every one else."

"Why, look at it, Nettie; not one girl in a thousand is either pretty or brilliant. The big majority don't begin to have Barbara's advantages of health, happy home, and easy circumstances; yet they don't go around like wandering thunder-clouds.

"Sometimes I long to put it to her plainly. Perhaps I ought to have done so in the first place; but it

didn't seem to me wise. Oh, she is cut on the bias! Come, we won't discuss her any more. Isn't that draft too strong for you? It is more sheltered over there."

With that the ladies moved out of ear-shot, and from their frequent laughter had evidently found a pleasanter topic.

Barbara was in a tumult of resentful mortification. To have her secret faults, secret even from herself, set forth in the light of day; to see herself as others saw her, and to find the vision altogether repellent, was a staggering experience.



## CHAPTER III

### THE UNEXPECTED MEETING

IT seemed an eternity to Barbara before the train for Borderville came in, and then instead of both friends going out onto the platform, Mrs. Barton bade Mrs. Gerald good-by in the doorway. In angry dismay Barbara shrank back to await the next Borderville train, by which time the Boston train would have carried the lady off.

"*This*," she said to herself, "is the limit!"

But it was not. For at that instant Mrs. Barton with a shiver closed the door and found herself face to face with the startled girl behind it.

"Well!" exclaimed she, her look of surprise quickly changing to one of pleasure. "This *is* luck! I thought you had gone on that train."

Then she paused, for Barbara, white and agitated, had risen.

"I want you to understand—I don't want you to think—you mustn't suppose," stammered the unhappy girl, "that I hid there on purpose to listen!"

"Oh, my dear girl," interrupted the lady, "such an idea never entered my head. How could it? You must have been here when we came in."

"Yes, and just as soon as I knew you were talking about me I started to come right out; but before I could do it Mrs. Gerald had told you—I was dis-

agreeable; and that almost knocked me down; and before—I could get over it, she had told you about the class, and—and other things; and then I just couldn't show myself; I was so—so——”

“So hurt,” suggested her companion sympathetically.

Barbara shook her head. “No,” with dogged honesty, “I was so furious—I was afraid of what I'd say or do. I didn't want to make a scene and have the other girls hear; and, oh, I didn't want to make you think any worse of me than you did already. I liked you *so* much, and I'd been trying to think out what chinks I could fill—and now she's spoiled it all! It was horrid, horrid, *horrid* of her to say what she did!”

“Do you think she was purposely horrid?”

“Oh, no, she isn't that sort.”

“But you do think she was mistaken?”

“I don't know, I'm sure. I wasn't nice in the class, that's true. I felt mad inside all the time. I couldn't help seeing she cared more for the others than for me, because they had been in her class longer.”

“Do you think it would have been better had she told you plainly what she thought?”

“No, it would have only made me madder and more sure that she was partial, and wasn't giving me a fair show. But I *did* like her, and I was trying to do as she said, and she ought to have seen *that*.”

“Even when you took all possible pains to conceal it from her?”

Barbara stirred uneasily but made no reply, then in a moment blurted out, as she turned toward Mrs. Barton a face expressing mingled chagrin, wistfulness, and rebellion:

"I don't see why every one should care for every one else, and no one, *not a single person*, care for me. I've got rights, too; and it's cruel of God to make it so that no one will care for me."

"Your parents, and brother, and sisters?"

"Oh, they!" and Barbara turned down her lips scornfully. "The girls are wrapped up in themselves and their doings and haven't time to care for me; and Mark trots after them like a pet dog; so of course he hasn't time for me. I sometimes doubt if he knows I'm in existence. Mother watches me, and corrects me, and makes me do the things the others don't like to do. And father idolizes them. He sits by the hour to hear Laura play the piano, or to discuss books and things with Susie, and as for Amy, she is petting him every chance there is."

"And what do *you* do for your father?"

"I? Why, I don't see what there is left for me to do. You heard Mrs. Gerald say that I was a non-entity beside my sisters."

"Yes, but why do you acquiesce in such a position?"

Barbara opened wide eyes of astonishment. "Acquiesce? I don't, I loathe it! But it doesn't depend on me."

"It certainly does, my dear girl. You could make yourself so useful to every member of your family that you would be in constant demand. There are thousands of little services that you can do, better, I'll warrant, than any of the others."

"I don't see why I should do all the services for them when they're not willing to do them for me," retorted Barbara with sullen obstinacy.



"Ah, that's the rub, is it? Well, I will tell you why. Because your Master said that He came to minister, and not to be ministered unto, and that the servant was not higher than his lord; but it was enough for him to be as his lord."

"Yes," said Barbara in a more subdued voice. "And I would minister to Him; but to *them*, that is different. Why is it any more my duty to them than theirs to me?"

"It isn't. But then you have nothing to do with what is their duty, but only with what is your own. And your duty is to minister as your Master did; and as He did, to minister freely without looking for repayment. Don't you remember that He said your Father in heaven gave rain and sunshine alike to the evil and the good, and that He added 'Be ye therefore perfect——' "

"'Even as your Father in heaven is perfect,' " quoted Barbara. "But I didn't suppose that that meant anything more than that we should be as good as we can. Of course we can't be perfect like God."

"Then why was it put that way? Jesus never spoke idle, senseless words. 'Perfect' is used in the sense of complete, consistent. God does not discriminate, but is kind to all, to the unthankful as well as to the appreciative and thankful."

Again Barbara was silent, but stirred uneasily; and then somewhat resentfully:

"You mean, then, that I ought to make myself something to be just sat upon and trampled on?"

Mrs. Barton laughed merrily. "Oh, yes. How could I mean otherwise? But I fancy you would make a pretty uncomfortable seat; and as for trampling—I

doubt if any of your family would have the courage for it, even if they had the inclination."

Barbara smiled reluctantly, and Mrs. Barton seized her opportunity.

"I mean just this: that I am sure you have hidden about you somewhere the talent for making others happy; and that you can, if you are willing, become the official chink-filler to your family. I have seen a great deal of girls, and I have always found that the girl who is sensitive herself is the girl who can reach the feelings of others."

"Yes," Barbara interposed grimly. "Mark says I know exactly where the joints of the armor are and how to stick my pin in."

This so completely tallied with Mrs. Barton's experience with such cases that she laughed again.

"Which goes to prove what I said; for the same opening is as convenient for introducing balm as a pin. Through the guidance of your own longing for kindly praise and attentions you can learn to detect and satisfy that longing in others. Your sympathies and appreciations are very quick, but their exercise is being misdirected—turned inward instead of outward.

"Besides, you sincerely aim to be honest; and are therefore bound to be as honest toward the virtues of others as toward their faults. These qualities I have mentioned make you peculiarly able to give happiness. What then about the obligation?"

A short hesitation, then the candid answer:

"I suppose you mean that if I can I ought, and I will try. And"—blushing—"as to my being honest, I did not tell the exact truth about my family. Mother is a dear, and does try to understand me; but—oh,



well, I suppose she thinks she must look out for the others too; and even so, the girls say she pays too much attention to my whims. And father, he has wanted me to play chess with him, but I don't like chess, and so— Perhaps it would please him if I offered, and I will. I suppose I do aggravate the girls and Mark; but they might consider how hard it is for me to be what you called 'overshadowed' by them."

Then incidentally it came out that she had come to the meeting only because her mother had insisted. Mrs. Barton caught at this opportunity for turning vague intentions into definite action.

"It will please your mother and give you a good start if, immediately upon reaching home, you tell her that she was right and you were wrong. And what will you do about Mrs. Gerald?"

A look of distress came over Barbara's face.

"I don't know. I wish I didn't have to ever see her again!"

Mrs. Barton pondered a moment, and then said:

"It was unfortunate that you should have received the truth from her, blade first instead of hilt first. She could be such a help to you. I have known Florence all her life, and never met any one more ready to love a girl, if the girl would only let herself be loved. I wonder"—looking questioningly at Barbara—"you don't think you could go to her?"

Compressed lips and a shake of the head were the answer, and she continued:

"No, I suppose it is not to be expected, and yet it will be awkward for you living in the same place and bound to meet her. Well," with a bright smile,

"we won't bother about that now; some way is sure to open. But isn't that my train coming?"

"Oh, dear," said Barbara, "and there were so many questions I wanted to ask you!"

For answer Mrs. Barton gathered her close to her and whispered:

"Ask your Father in heaven those questions, and I too will ask Him to help you."

Then she kissed her and opened the door. From the car-steps she said cheerily to Barbara, who had hurried after her:

"Don't try at first to build. Just look out for the chinks; and don't be discouraged if the mortar doesn't always stick."

## CHAPTER IV

### PLANNING VERSUS PRACTISING

**B**ARBARA returned to the waiting-room so uplifted and stimulated that it seemed easy to at once plunge into good works. But when, eager to begin, she looked about the station there was an obvious dearth of opportunity. She was the only person in it; even the ticket-agent had closed his window and stepped out. So she gave herself up to happy planning, wherein all her affairs moved rapidly and successfully, without a single slip or drawback.

First of all she would tell her mother how she had resolved from this glad day to be a "chink-filler," and all that was lovely, kindly, and unselfish. She could almost see her mother's lovingly responsive smile and hear her encouraging words: "I knew that my Barbara had a noble nature if she would only let it have fair play. My child, you have made me happier than I can express!"

After Barbara had enjoyed hearing in fancy as much praise from her mother as if she had already accomplished a lifetime of kind deeds, she allowed her imagination to carry her to the meeting with her schoolmates the next morning. How they groaned with envy when they heard that she had had a long conversation with Mrs. Barton, but how sweetly she disarmed them by frankly acknowledging that they were right in their estimate of this lady, and that she herself was completely converted to their views. And

then, just allowing pause enough for Grace Alden to say, "There; didn't I tell you, girls, that Babs is honest through and through, even when it goes against herself?" she went on to suggest that they form a Chink-Fillers' Society.

With what enthusiastic exclamations was this received—"Perfectly splendid!" "The best thing yet!" and much more of the same sort—as she unfolded her plan, and her hearers marvelled at the ingenuity and completeness of it, until even the scornful Mary Ann Peters cried: "Why didn't we think of all that ourselves, girls?" Then fancy painted how immediately they organized, and she was unanimously elected. But no, Barbara really was too honest not to recognize that not in any way, much less unanimously, was there one chance in a thousand that she would be chosen president. But secretary? Yes, that might happen, or treasurer; surely, in very justice they would insist that she, the originator, should hold some office. And then they would— Here fancy seemed at a loss as to what the new society would do. It required some hard thinking, and then all began to run smoothly again. There were those forlorn shanties down by the creek; they would teach the women how to keep their places and their children clean. And, oh, yes, there was the hospital, where they could read and sing to the sick, and where flowers and good things to eat would always be welcome. And then there was the jail. But, no, it was doubtful whether their mothers would consider jail-visiting proper for them.

She was excitedly arguing with herself whether the poorhouse should be substituted for the jail, or whether they should go ahead with the jail and prove



to those benighted mothers that their clever daughters knew better what was good for themselves than they did, when the Borderville train thundered in. Still deep in a brown study, Barbara hurried out, and quite unconscious of what she was about, automatically elbowed her way through the crowd of commuters and sprang up the car-steps. In doing so she pushed aside a boy who already had one foot on the lower step, but she did not even perceive him, much less notice that he was a cripple. She had a dim, half-conscious sense of shouts behind her; but too absorbed to take them in, she only wavered an instant, and then hastened into the car. As she dropped into a seat beside an Italian laborer, she decided that it might be better to begin with the poorhouse, and after resplendent success in making the paupers happy, strong, efficient, self-supporting, and everything else that poorhouse inmates are not supposed to be, then to take up the jail work.

By this time Barbara's imagination had attained such dexterity that it was not long before all the jail-birds were reformed, and made into leading citizens; so that while the poorhouse had become a delightful social community house, the jail had been turned into an uplifting social club-house—results devoutly to be desired, but not apt to be achieved with the speed of Barbara's optimistic vision.

She was aroused from her reverie just as she seemed to be hearing their old pastor say, with glistening eyes: "My child, I feel that the influence of your life has done more for this town than all my years of preaching!" What aroused her was a clear and manly voice, vibrant with sympathy but at the same time

merrily authoritative, saying: "You poor thing! Don't you dare to move another inch. I'll go ahead and find a seat for you."

Barbara looked up. A young man was striding forward, and leaning on the back of her own seat was a very stout, ordinary-looking woman. As their eyes met, the latter said with a grimace of pain:

"I wouldn't mind standing if my ankle wasn't so plaguy bad!"

At once the Italian laborer sprang up with a smile.

"If the mees letta me to passa, I givva my seat to the lady."

"You're the right kind of a boy, even if you are only a dago!" said the stout woman gratefully.

The Italian's white teeth gleamed through his smile.

"Dago boy gooda same Yanka boy!"

"And better than some Yank girls," retorted she, dropping into the seat beside Barbara. "I'd just like to get hold of that girl and give her one good trouncing, that I would!" Then seeing Barbara's look of surprise, she continued: "I mean the minx who made all the trouble. We was all waitin' for a lame boy; he had one foot on the step already and his crutch on the other side of him to steady him while he hauled himself up, when along comes a girl, hurryin' for all she was worth; rushes by us; pushes the boy off the step; and skips up into the car before you could say Jack Robinson! Of course the boy fell, and his crutch flew out and throwed me so that I twisted my ankle some way. But I feel worse about the poor boy. His crutch got broke and I'm afraid he got hurt."

"Some horrid factory girl, I suppose," said Barbara with indignant superiority.

"I didn't see her, worse luck; it was all over so quick. There he comes now; if it hadn't been for that there young feller, I don't know how I'd ever got onto the train. The rest was all busy with the lame boy."

"Well, I'm glad you've found a seat; the train is simply packed," exclaimed the same cheery voice Barbara had heard before. Then as he caught her eye a funny little twinkle lighted his own.

"Yes, that big dago feller give me his."

The young man turned to the laborer, saying cordially, "I wish every one was as polite as you Italians are," and soon they were in animated conversation, the American making merry over his attempts at the mother tongue of the other.

"How's the poor lame boy?" asked the woman.

"He is a good deal shaken up and there may be more nervous shock than appears; but he's so plucky that it's hard to find out just how much he is hurt."

"Did you see the minx that done it?"

He hesitated, then noting the interest in Barbara's face, answered: "Yes, but I don't believe she had any idea of what she did. She was in a brown study, and might have been a sleep-walker for all she knew of what was going on."

"Well," from the irate woman, "it won't do for folks to walk in their sleep around railroads. Do you see her anywhere in this car? I'd like a chance to speak my mind to her."

The young man, turning his back and looking up and down the length of the aisle, answered:

"No, I certainly do not see her now, and I am investigating from end to end of the car."

When he turned to them again Barbara wondered



what he had found so amusing, for his eyes twinkled more than ever, and he gave her a glance of sly merri-ment that nettled her.

"Though, of course," she said to herself, "he is laughing at that dreadful, common woman. But I don't see why he looks as if he wanted to joke me about her, unless he thinks she is an acquaintance of mine."

So to disprove it she drew away from her companion and somewhat stiffly asked how far she had to go.

"I get off at Borderville, and for the land's sake how I'm going to do it I don't know."

The young man looked troubled. "The brakeman and I will get you down the steps; but I don't know how you will manage then. I have to go to Amity to look after the boy."

"My nephew was to meet me with his nag, but she's that skittish he can't come down to the train. He was to wait for me back of Judd's store; but how I'm to git to meet him there—" And she looked quite discouraged. "If I could only git hold of that minx of a girl I'd make her help me, and don't you forgit it!"

It suddenly struck Barbara that here was her opportunity, and she said with an air of patronage: "Oh, I get off at Borderville, too. I will help you."

At that the young man turned away and seemed to find the lurch the train gave him against the Italian very funny, for the light of laughter was still in his eyes when he turned to Barbara with the words:

"That will fill the bill to the very dot."

As they were leaving the train at Borderville they passed a pale, shrinking boy holding a broken crutch



across his knees. He straightened himself and a bright smile replaced the look of pain, as with a gay "Oh, I'm all right," he answered Barbara's impulsive "I'm so sorry you were hurt!"

The brakeman and the dago helped the heavy lady down. "Gooda lucka!" called the latter, and the stranger waved his hat, and off went the train, leaving Barbara alone with her new and weighty responsibility.

"Here, I'll carry your bag and you take my arm," ordered she with an authority which was ignored.

"I'm Mrs. Martin, and anybody that knows me knows that I knows what I'm about. You can have the bag, all right, but you're too short for me to take your arm. I'll take your shoulder and use my umbrella like a cane with the other hand."

This accordingly she did; but nothing worked very well. Her ankle had become stiff and painful, and she bore so heavily upon Barbara that the latter, already overweighted with the heavy bag, swayed so as to prove very poor support.

"Ouch!" cried Mrs. Martin, jerking her sharply. "Can't you walk steady, girl? You're a mighty poor stick of a thing! I believe I could get on better without you. You don't seem to have any sense about helping folks. I guess you never done much of it."

Barbara dropped the bag in disgust, roughly withdrew her shoulder, and said:

"I certainly never before helped any one who acted as you do. If you want to walk alone, you can do it," and she turned away.

"Oh, don't leave me!" cried the woman. "I didn't mean to be cross; but if you knew how it hurts! The

pain is fair killing me ! Oh, dear, oh, dear, what shall I do ?" And leaning on the umbrella, which bent dangerously, she began to whimper.

"Perfectly disgusting !" thought Barbara. "Big, fat thing like that !" As if being big and fat made pain less painful. However, she returned, and said:

"Here, sit on the station-steps, and I'll hunt up your nephew. His horse won't be afraid now that the train has gone."

With pain and difficulty Mrs. Martin was at last seated, moaning that she didn't see what would become of her; she had all her spring cleaning to do, and there was the church supper coming on, and how was she ever to get back home. All interspersed with many "ouches" in anguished tones. But long before her plaint was ended, Barbara was speeding to the rear of Judd's store, wishing she had thought to ask what was the nephew's name, or at least how he looked and what sort of a vehicle he drove; but most of all wishing that she had let the whole business alone. Just then she heard a man remark to his horse:

"Wall, Sal, I allow the old lady ain't come, so you and me'll be gittin' along."

"See here !" Barbara almost shouted in her anxiety, "are you Mrs. Martin's nephew? She's hurt her ankle and can't walk. Drive around on Main Street, down by the station."

"My mare's pretty skittish about trains," objected he.

"Nonsense ! The train's gone. You do as I say," ordered Barbara; and she hurried back to her weeping and groaning patient.

"Oh, do stop that!" she exclaimed. "Your nephew is coming. I've managed everything."

"B-b-ut," sobbed Mrs. Martin, "ho-ow'm I to gi-i-it in?"

"I'm sure *I* don't know!" snapped Barbara. "If you were as much a baby in size as in behavior we could lift you in easy enough."

"Hello, Aunt Lowisee! Wall, wall, who'd of thought you'd be up to sich capers?" called a jocular voice.

"Here he is now; get up, I'll help you in."

"No, you don't, miss. You couldn't heft her no more'n a barrel of flour. You hold Sal; both sides of the bridle, close up to the bit. Don't be afeard; she'll stand all right if she's helt tight."

Rather to her surprise, Barbara found herself obediently following directions, and holding the nervous animal, who was inclined to back away from even the neighborhood of the station. The man lifted, pushed, and wriggled his aunt into the old carryall, jocosely encouraging her, while she wept out on his shoulder her complaint.

"Girls ain't what they was when I was young! Here's one knocked me down, and another's been insultin' me steady!"

"There, there," soothed he. "Anyway, this one got holt of me all right and bossed me like I was her son." Here he laughed loudly. "Hold tight, miss, till I git a-holt o' the lines, and then step back, and let her rip."

Barbara did exactly as bid, and saw with satisfaction Sal, the skittish, dash off across the tracks. Still, as she hurried homeward, there was an unaccountable, intangible sense of discomfort at the back of her



mind; it seemed somehow to connect itself with the young man who smiled. Though she assured herself that, of course, his amusement was caused by that ridiculous creature who had just ridden away, she could not rid herself of the impression that it included her also. She put her hands to her head; but, no, her hat and hair were as they should be. And yet, in spite of every effort to shake it off, that vague discomfort shadowed her thoughts.



## CHAPTER V

### BARBARA BECOMES ACQUAINTED WITH HER FATHER

AS Barbara entered the house, her mother met her hurriedly.

"Why, Barbara, what in the world has kept you? I was really beginning to worry. Now run——"

"Oh, mother," interrupted the girl, "I want to tell you that——"

But her intention to immediately follow Mrs. Barton's advice to confess that her mother was right was frustrated by her mother herself.

"Never mind now, Barbara. Run up-stairs as fast as you can and get your father's suitcase ready; he leaves on the next train for Washington."

"But it won't take over a minute to tell you——"

"There's not a minute to spare. Go at once, as I say."

"Can't I even have some supper first?" Barbara's tone was exceedingly aggrieved.

"You should have been here in time for supper." Then as her daughter started to speak: "Not another word. Do as I say immediately."

As Barbara ran up the stairs she flung back over her shoulder:

"If you were in such a desperate hurry, why didn't you have Amy pack the case?"

She flung off her coat and hat in much the same mood and manner as she had flung them on a few

hours before, and glumly began her task. It was the one and only service she regularly performed for her father, whose business frequently called him away on sudden trips. It was a responsibility she had herself elected to assume, and she had won her father's approving statement that she had never by any chance forgotten a single article he needed.

It is true, Barbara too often went about it with the worst possible grace, complaining bitterly that her father apparently planned his trips so as to interrupt her most cherished occupations. Nevertheless, so jealous was she of her official position (dubbed by Mark as K. S. C., Keeper of the Suit Case) that once when her mother, weary of her complaints, had let Amy pack the case, Barbara had kept the family in hot water for a week with her paroxysms of resentment and her sullen harping upon this invasion of her rights. Her father had returned during this spell of weather, as Mark irreverently termed it, and had forced a very reluctant explanation from his wife.

"Send her to me in the library!" he had sternly ordered.

"Oh, Lloyd!" And Mrs. Morrison looked unuttered pleadings.

His face cleared. "There, there, I shan't eat her up; but neither shall she go on devouring the peace of the family."

Not wild horses could have drawn from Barbara a confession of her dread of the rare interviews with her father in the library; but she never failed to emerge from them "made over" (Mark's expression again) for the time being. Whether it was her father's quietness of manner or his sarcasms that drove the

evil spirit out, Barbara could not have told; but she, as well as he, recognized with a pain that would have surprised the other that each interview drove them farther apart and built higher the barriers between them.

Tired and hungry, Barbara fretted and fumed over the packing. What indeed was the use of her ever trying to do the high and noble things she had planned when even her own mother had no sympathy with her efforts? Hadn't she been ready to be as humble and sweet as—as—oh, any sort of an angel, and her mother simply wouldn't give her a chance. There never was a girl, *never*, who had everything against her as she had. But at last the packing was done. She hastened down-stairs, and saying shortly, "There is your suitcase, father," she dropped it at his feet and hurried in to her belated supper, ignoring his intention to kiss her good-by, just as earlier in the day she had ignored her mother's. As the front door closed upon her secret hope that he might follow her into the dining-room for his farewell, she thought with a resentful pang:

"Much he cares for me, even if I am his own daughter!" without considering that he had even more cause for thinking: "Much she cares for me, even if I am her own father!"

"Where are the girls?" she asked curtly as her mother entered the room.

"Church concert, my dear; have you forgotten that absorbing event?"

"Humph! It doesn't begin till eight."

"No, but Mark and the girls went on to Mrs. Gerald's to do some rehearsing. Whatever made



you so late, Barbara? The other girls passed here from the earlier train."

"I can't help it if they did; I missed it," she snapped. The mention of Mrs. Gerald's name had extinguished the last spark of good intention, and the evil spirit held full sway.

Her mother sighed wearily and returned to the library. The next moment, through the open doorway, she saw Barbara race up-stairs and almost immediately race down again, and fly out of the house.

"Barbara," she called, "where are you going? You will catch cold without your coat!"

There was no reply, and by the time she could reach the front door the girl was out of sight around the corner, running swiftly toward the station. Half-way there she caught up with her father.

"Oh," she gasped, out of breath, "I was afraid the train had gone!"

"No, it isn't time yet. I went ahead to the post-office. But what has happened?" stopping in his leisurely walk with some alarm. She explained shamefacedly that she had forgotten all his "shaving things," and handed him a half-wrapped package.

"*You forgot!* It is unheard of for you to forget anything I need. How did that come about?" and he tucked her hand under his arm as he continued on his way; but stopped short in amazement at her answer.

"I was so perfectly furious with mother!"

"So furious with your mother! *Your mother!*" And to Barbara's surprise his voice shook. "With that sweet saint! Ah, my child, though your anger should rise against all the combined goodness and



sweetness in the world, never, never against her who all your life has borne so much for you and from you. Tell me all about it."

There was no evading the command. Her father listened with marked interest, and as she ended, he glanced at his watch, and then turned back to a small patch of greensward, and drew her down beside him upon the single bench it contained.

"But, father, that is your express coming now."

"The local will be here soon, and perhaps I can make connections by that; but even if I can't, you are worth more, Barbara, than all the business I was going for."

Not a little overawed, she sat silent as he continued in kindly tones:

"For you to decide upon almost any practically useful line of conduct is a great forward stride, and this chink-filling idea looks promising. But your decision isn't worth the time it took you to make it if it topples over the moment your mother substitutes another chink for the one you had chosen to fill."

"Why, I never thought of your suitcase as a chink."

"No, because self-gratification was your dominant motive."

He instantly repented his words at the quiver of her lips, which showed she felt them a cruel injustice.

"There, dear child," and he drew her closer. "I may be mistaken—I hope I am. This I will say for you: that you have plainly developed an intention to combat your antisocial tendencies, and therein I owe you every assistance, because those miserable antisocial tendencies are derived direct from me. Yes,

Barbara, it is unhappily true that from me you have inherited a morbid, jealous, suspicious disposition. Anything you can do now to correct this means deliverance from lifelong torture. Whether you might have been saved this inheritance had I done that for myself when your age, I cannot say; but by my failure to at least have given you this chance I have long considered that I needed your forgiveness. There, there," for she had thrown her arms about him, weeping, "don't take it so tragically, Babs. It will be a great satisfaction to work with you for your escape from this bondage. Your mother is the first and only one who ever lent me a helping hand. Whatever victories I have gained are, under God, due to her. But Heaven knows the sweet saint has had enough trouble with me without having to go through it all again with you. That belongs to me. All of this would have been told you months ago but that your attitude toward me made it impossible."

"Oh, father, father, forgive me; but really and truly I had made up my mind you hated me."

"Hated you! What an insane idea! But there it is again, just a reproduction of my own style of insane imaginings. Now listen, child; put that silliness out of your head forever. Never has there been anything for you but a deep love in my heart; all the deeper as I recognized in you manifestations of my worst self, and saw in you a soul crippled by my own very great fault.

"Now, Barbara, take this in hand with a will and fight it to a finish. Your mother and I have done our part in teaching you to distinguish right and wrong, and you are old enough to make your own choice

between them. The responsibility now rests with you, and it no longer should be necessary for us to say 'You must' or 'You must not'; though it will always be our happiness to advise and help, and I hold myself freely at your call."

He rose. "And now, precious child, I must go, but remember from this moment we are beginning a new era together."

Trembling with cold and excitement, Barbara seized his hands and kissed them; and as he turned toward the station she hastened homeward with heart as light as her feet. But what would have been Mr. Morrison's consternation had he known the disastrous effect of his well-meant confessions upon Barbara's undeveloped sense of proportion. The long-standing reserve between them had all too well kept him in ignorance of the kinks and quirks in his youngest daughter's composition.



## CHAPTER VI

### BARBARA IS INTRODUCED TO HERSELF

AS Barbara re-entered the library, her mother asked: "Where have you been this chilly evening without your coat and hat?"

"Now," as the explanation was given, "of course you are in for one of your bronchial attacks! How could your father have kept you out in this dampness?"

"Now, mother, don't say a word against father; he is just the noblest creature ever!"

"My dear Babs, I knew years before you were even born that your father is 'the noblest creature ever,' and I have always thought you singularly blind not to recognize it; but the recognition won't protect you from bronchitis."

"Well, mother," crouching over the fire her mother had set alight in the grate, "even if I have *pneumonia*, I can never regret this evening with father. If you could have heard the things he said about you, that you had been the one who helped him conquer his faults, and"—clasping her hands over her mother's knees—"the tone in which he called you 'that sweet saint.'"

"Your father said that to *you*? Well, what next!" with a despairing sigh.

"Why, yes; why not? And he told me that I had



inherited my pernicketiness from him. Oh, of course, he didn't use that word, but that's what he meant—and he begged my pardon."

For a moment Mrs. Morrison sat speechless while Barbara prattled on of her father's fondness for her, the daughter patterned after himself. This exaggerated sense of his accountability for Barbara's unfortunate disposition was not unknown to his wife, and she had long feared some ill-advised expression of it which would completely turn that young person's flighty head. Apparently this was exactly what had happened. So it was with considerable vehemence she exclaimed:

"Your father begged your pardon! Do you realize, child, *your father!* And you allowed him to thus humiliate himself to *you?*"

"But, mother, he didn't humiliate himself; I never respected or loved him so much in all my life. You don't understand father."

The unconsciously patronizing tone in which this was said made Mrs. Morrison realize that now, if ever, was the time for drastic measures.

"Barbara, your absurdity is beyond belief. It is *you* who do not understand your father. He has been a miracle of patience with you, and if you had been the Queen of Sheba herself you could not have flouted him worse. But in spite of your ungrateful, unfilial conduct he has kept on loving you and trying to win you. Why, this very evening when your father stooped to kiss you, you paid no attention, but left him standing there."

"I know. I have been perfectly *horrid*," assented Barbara in a tone so humble and contrite that Mrs.

Morrison was silenced. "Then you don't think I am so very like father as he said?"

"I should think so far more if you imitated your father's efforts to conquer the tendency to the blues that you both have in common. He had more than enough excuse in early life for yielding; you have none. That is why I say that you do not understand him. As boy and young man your father's lot was one of loneliness, hardship, and disappointment. I often wonder how he bore it at all, instead of coming forth so noble from what to most others would have meant moral shipwreck.

"You, on the contrary, have been surrounded by every sort of loving care, and guarded from troubles and hardships; and yet you——"

"Yes, I know; I've a 'morbid, jealous, and suspicious disposition,' " quoted Barbara. "I 'go through life with a chip on my shoulder'; I have 'ungracious manners'; I 'manufacture unhappiness for myself and every one else'; and 'go around like a wandering thunder-cloud.' "

"Barbara, what ails you?" cried her mother, really alarmed as the girl calmly reeled off these self-accusations.

"Nothing at all," was the reckless reply, "excepting that 'them's the sentiments' of Mrs. Gerald concerning me; and that 'my sensitiveness and appreciations are misdirected' are Mrs. Barton's; and that I'm 'a poor stick of a thing, and not used to helping' are those of the charming Mrs. Martin. The fact that I know all this, and that I know that my father loves me, and that we are 'beginning a new era together,' and that I acknowledge that I have been a

wretch is entirely due to you, you sweet saint, just because in the first place you made me go to that meeting."

And forthwith she began to give a detailed account of her experiences.

"But why," interrupted her mother, "should that young man have laughed at you?"

"Oh, it wasn't at me; it was at that figure of fun, Mrs. Martin."

"What sort of a young man was he?"

"Not any particular sort, just a young man."

"A laborer?"

"Oh, dear me, no, mother; a gentleman. Why, he wore gray suède gloves!"

Whereat Mrs. Morrison laughed, and Barbara continued her tale.

"I am afraid," said her mother at its conclusion, "that that poor woman was more hurt than you think for. It is a pretty serious matter for such a heavy person to be thrown down, and probably what you call her 'babyishness' was really shaken nerves."

"But I am glad that you helped her, my dear, even if it does seem to you that she was not properly appreciative. After all, our obligation to be helpful depends entirely upon our opportunity and ability. You don't find in the parable of the Good Samaritan a word about the sufferer's appreciativeness; indeed, the Samaritan himself did not once consider the other's attitude toward himself—he was too much of a gentleman for that."

"Too much of a gentleman!" exclaimed Barbara. "Why, mother, what a funny idea."

"But isn't it the very essence of true courtesy to



consider another with absolute forgetfulness of oneself?"

Barbara pondered. "I believe you are right, you sweet saint!" And forthwith began to hug and cuddle her mother extravagantly.

"Barbara," remonstrated the other, when she had struggled free, "you act like a crazy creature! You mustn't sit up a moment longer, you are as croaky as a frog already."

So she was given a preventive dose and hurried to bed, where, contrary to her excited expectations, she immediately dropped into a doze. The query, "Really, why did he laugh?" broke in for an instant, and the next Barbara was sound asleep.

It was well after midnight when she suddenly awoke and sat bolt upright with the startled conviction that it was she who had knocked the boy off the step. How she knew she could not have told, but know she did beyond a peradventure. It at once explained to her that vague sense of discomfort at the back of her mind; and it solved the enigma of the young man's amusement. Try her best she could not recall any clear details, only a hazy consciousness that she had brushed some one aside and that there had immediately arisen noise and confusion behind her; but the conviction only strengthened that it was she who had caused all the mischief.

Then she became aware that her head ached madly, and that her chest seemed bound with a band of steel, and her hands were hot and dry; in short, that all the well-known symptoms of bronchitis were upon her. She sank back miserable in body and mind. Finally she fell into a feverish sleep and dreamed that



she was rushing through a dense crowd, snapping the bones of all that she met. Each time a bone broke it made a queer sound like a cough and gave her a pain in her chest. Then she was conscious of a spoon at her lips and of her mother's voice saying:

"Here, child, take this; perhaps it will stop your coughing."

"Mother," said Barbara huskily and sleepily, "you and father are perfect saints, but it will be a long time before I am any old kind of a saint."

Mrs. Morrison laughed. "Oh, I am not worrying lest any of us get our halos too soon. There, don't think any more; just go to sleep."

For a while it seemed as if the pressure of her mother's soft, cool hand on her forehead had charmed the pain away; but with her departure it returned, and with it a steady increase of misery as Barbara saw herself for what she was, and owned that the sum total of the verdict pronounced upon her had been correct. Shame added to the heat of the fever at memory of the wonderful things she had vaingloriously planned in smug self-righteousness at the very moment she was actually injuring others.

"Oh," she whispered to her pillow, "I'm the worst ever. I do wish mother was here." But as she opened her mouth to call she thought better of it and sighed: "No, it's too bad to wake her up again."

And this act of self-denial was the first tiny indication that Barbara's repentance was the honest stuff that works reformation.

## CHAPTER VII

### WITH THE AID OF HER FAMILY BARBARA PROGRESSES

THE next morning found Barbara in a state of irritated discontent. She complained that of course it was just her luck to be laid up in bed when she particularly wanted to go to school. What was the use of her ever making a real try to do the right thing when something always happened to prevent her? She was not a little surprised when her mother pointed out that there was no element of "luck" or "happening" in the matter, but merely the natural consequences of going out without her jacket, so that she had only herself to blame for the thwarting of her school plan. Barbara objected that since she went out for a good purpose she ought to have been protected from catching cold. Mrs. Morrison laughed heartily at the notion that all the natural laws should have been held up to save her from the consequences of a needless carelessness.

"But," she added, "though you have no claim to pose as a martyr, you have a fine opportunity to display a martyr's serene cheerfulness in bearing your discomforts and not allowing them to cause discomfort to others."

Later, at the breakfast-table, Mrs. Morrison suggested to her other children that they should show

Barbara some special little attentions, as this illness was a serious disappointment to her.

"I don't believe she would have these bronchial attacks so often if she half took care of herself," commented Mark severely.

"Nevertheless, big brother, be good to her," smiled back his mother.

"But, mother," objected Amy, "you know that nothing we do for her is ever good in her estimation."

"Yes," added Susie, "she seems to resent whatever we do, and yet thinks us heartless if we don't wait upon her; besides acting as if it were all our fault when she is sick, and nothing we can do is sufficient atonement."

Laura shrugged her shoulders. "She always makes me feel so guilty because of my base inconsiderateness in being well that I fairly dread going into her room; and yet if I say anything about not being well, her attitude expresses scorn for my meanness in competing with her for the prize of wretchedness."

Mrs. Morrison smiled upon the four. "It does require a high order of magnanimity, doesn't it," quizzed she, "to ignore past rebuffs and generously face the possibility of fresh ones?"

"Thank you, mother," said Mark, somewhat flushed, as he left the table.

"I will take up her grapefruit," said Laura.

"And I will take up the rest of her breakfast," offered Susie.

"And I," said Amy, starting for the door, "will bathe her face and hands and punch up her pillows."

Just here Mark entered with the first snowdrop of the season, and laid it beside the grapefruit with a



card on which he had written: "The early invalid catches the early blossom, with love from Mark." Then he stooped to kiss his mother good-by, saying: "If we hadn't you, little mother, to provoke us to love and good works, how selfish and hard we should become."

"No, no," and she regarded proudly her manly son and sweet-faced daughters, "you all have within you the generous impulses without which my appeals would be futile."

As Amy began her ministrations she remarked sympathetically that it was a shame Barbara should again have one of these horrid attacks of bronchitis. But although the latter looked up gratefully, she said:

"Amy, it is entirely my own fault this time, just as mother says, and I don't deserve a bit of pity or attention."

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed her sister, so startled she almost dropped the basin of hot water. "What has taken the child?"

Barbara's lips quivered, but she shook her head and remained silent.

"There, there," cooed Amy, softly mopping and drying her face and hands. "She shouldn't be teased with questions; no, she shouldn't. And even if it is her own fault, she shall be coddled and fixed up like a pet kitten, so she shall."

Barbara laughed; and then as Laura appeared with the grapefruit, and she saw the snowdrop and read the card, her face flushed with pleasure and an unwonted sparkle brightened her eyes, but she only said "Thank you" in an embarrassed tone.

However, when Susie came with the breakfast,



Barbara's face clouded and she asked suspiciously:

"Where's mother? Did she set you at this work for me?"

"There now, enough of that," exclaimed Susie pleasantly. "'Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.' As long as we are sorry for you and glad to wait upon you, why shouldn't you receive as cordially as we give? I won't deny that without mother's encouragement we should all have been afraid to come." Barbara's look of surprise provoked her sisters' merriment, and Susie continued: "Yes, *afraid*; you have so often shown a dislike to our services that naturally we become reluctant to force them upon you; but mother reassured us, and we each without a hint from her selected what to do. So, Miss Particular, try to enjoy having us all paying you attentions. It won't last long; we have other things to attend to."

"We are more than ever sorry for you," said Laura, "because mother told us that not being able to go to school to-day was an especial disappointment to you."

"Did she say *why*?" and the tone was far from genial. "I don't see why she need tell you anything about me."

Amy spoke decidedly. "Barbara, you know perfectly well that mother never, never gives us away to each other. That was every word she told until I asked her innocently enough what was going on at school, and she simply said some interesting experiment you proposed to try on the girls. I suppose she wanted to make sure we would be patient if you were inclined to be grumptious with us on account of your disappointment. Come, Babs, do let us be sorry for you if we want to, and do let us show it without

turning upon us as if we were hypocritical. You wouldn't like us to think that of you; why should you think it of us?"

"No"—from Susie—"for we pride ourselves on our honesty just as much as you do on yours; did you never suspect that?" and her face lighted up with her whimsical smile.

Barbara started to speak, but instead was shaken with a paroxysm of coughing. Susie rescued the breakfast-tray, while all looked so genuinely distressed and sympathetic that even Barbara's grotesque suspicions were allayed, and when Amy suggested she should try the school experiment on them, she only needed the unanimous concurrence of the rest to consent. She gave a sketch of Mrs. Barton's address, and confessed her intention of starting a chink-filling club.

Probably nothing in all her self-isolated, suspicious, and jealous life had ever awakened in Barbara such a sense of good comradeship as the cordiality with which her sisters received her communication. They immediately pledged themselves as The Slab Chink-Fillers—a title furnished by Laura as a roll-call in itself because it contained their initials in the order of seniority.

Here their mother broke up the conclave.

"Go right about filling chinks then," she said, "for there are plenty of them. Mary has such a headache that she is not fit for work; the wind has blown papers all over the library floor; and every flower vase in the house needs filling."

The continued kindly attentions of her sisters encouraged Barbara to persist in patience and consider-

ateness; and she would have almost enjoyed this illness had it not been for her remorse on account of the lame boy. Much as her harping on this in a self-pitying strain troubled Mrs. Morrison, she felt still more the neglect of Barbara's schoolmates. Grace Alden was the only one who called, and even she hastily declined the invitation to go to the sick-room. It was unpleasantly evident to the disturbed mother that her antisocial daughter had been at as little pains to win affection outside as within her home.

"My poor, unhappy child," thought she, "however are you to get on in the world if you nourish this unfriendly disposition? What can the future hold but suffering for you and for those your life touches?"

So she tried, as she had often before, to make Barbara realize that "she who would have friends must show herself friendly," with the discouraging discovery that apparently the girl did not even desire to possess friends. To her reproofs for the accusations Barbara brought against her schoolmates the girl retorted:

"Well, why shouldn't I think such things of them when I am sure they think worse still of me?"

"If they do," said her mother at last, "it is only an illustration of the truth that with what judgment you judge you shall be judged.

"Besides, it is impossible to believe these wholesale accusations of yours; for there could not be so large a class in any school with not a single good or noble girl in it. Even if I did not myself know from personal acquaintance what calumnies you are uttering, common sense would tell me."

"Mother," cried Barbara, "you are the most cruel



woman I ever heard of! You tell me right to my face that I am a liar and every other horrid thing! I couldn't have imagined a mother standing up for other girls against her own daughter!"

"But suppose she knows her own daughter to be in the wrong?"

"That shouldn't make a mite of difference; they are nothing to you and I ought to be everything to you."

This was so preposterous that Mrs. Morrison laughed at first, then said seriously:

"It is just because you are everything to me that I cannot allow you to give yourself over to all uncharitableness."

But Barbara was not to be appeased. She launched into a joint paroxysm of coughing, weeping, and storming, until by her mother's firmness and the medicine she administered she was both obliged and enabled to quiet down. Then Mrs. Morrison left her to sleep off the effects of her outbreak, wondering to herself whether it would have been wiser to have omitted the reproof.

"It did seem cruel when she is sick," she thought, "but it was my first chance since her conscience has been aroused; and, oh, her soul is so much sicker than her body, and so much more worth healing!"

That evening she was reassured when in the gloaming Barbara drew her face close to hers and whispered:

"Forgive me, sweet saint; you were all right, and I was all wrong. I know, motherkins, that you were just trying to build a wall to keep me from the Bad Lands, and if I *would* butt my head into it, I deserved to be hurt. But ever since I woke up I have been

trying to think out the good qualities in the girls; so," rather shakily, "won't you try to think there are some good qualities in me too?"

"Yes, my precious one," whispered back her mother, "for the word works both ways; when you judge kindly, kindly judgment is sure to be given to you. I know that my Barbara has capabilities for all that is noble and sweet, if she will only exercise them." Then with another kiss: "My darling, you have made me very, very happy."

Later Barbara realized that she had received from her mother the very commendation that on the day of the meeting she had imagined herself receiving; and that it came, not in response to any high-flown plans for public work, but to sincere repentance and confession. Thereupon she did some wholesome meditating upon the value of small acts as indicating right purposes; and in a day or so this timely meditation bore fruit.

## CHAPTER VIII

### BARBARA BECOMES ACQUAINTED WITH HER SISTERS

**B**ARBARA, nearly well, was trying to study when she heard Amy in the next room communing with herself.

"Now, if I could stand on my head or tie myself into a bow-knot, perhaps I could accomplish it; but as it is, Amy, you idjit, I expect you'll have to remain in this position the rest of your natural life. Why did you, did you get yourself into such a ridiculous scrape?"

"What under the sun is the matter?" asked Barbara, hastening forward to where Amy stood with her right arm extended half-way down her back.

"Oh, nothing, only that my sleeve and back have formed a mutual attachment and are inseparable."

"Let me fix it."

Amy looked her surprise, for as a rule Barbara no more thought of offering aid than the others thought of asking her for it.

"It's my new dress, and I was trying it on to surprise you with, but I surprised myself instead."

"It's the most complicated thing I ever saw," exclaimed Barbara. "That button on the sleeve caught in the lace. No, don't move; I'll put you together this time, and then you will know just how all these fastenings go."



When at last freed, Amy whirled about and caught her sister in her arms with a hearty hug.

"Babs, you're a brick of a chink-filler! Think of the tragedy if I had been captive for life to the intricacies of a new gown. What do you think of it? You're the first soul I've shown it to."

Barbara flushed with pleasure.

"Amy, it's a dream!" she said solemnly, and added what her jealousy had never before allowed her to admit: "You are the most perfectly beautiful creature ever! I don't wonder father and mother and all the rest worship you. Oh," she continued passionately, "if I had one-quarter of your beauty I am sure I could be as good as gold. It must be awfully easy to be good when a girl is so beautiful that every one bows down before her."

"Oh, Barbara, stop. If you only knew what a temptation admiration always is, and what a bore it becomes. You can't think how it disgusts me to have Mrs. Price introduce me to her friends as 'the beautiful Miss Morrison.' It makes me so angry that I can hardly be decent to them. Then when mere snips of boys crowd around me at companies and talk foolishness, I feel as if my good looks were a disgrace. They certainly are a disadvantage when they take precedence of me myself."

"But they are a part of you yourself."

"Only the envelope. If I were to lose them this instant I myself would still be left; and I know that that same 'I myself' is a lot more valuable than any mere prettiness. Still," blushing, "I don't deny that my beauty, such as it is, gratifies me and gives me a sense of power and influence I would not otherwise

have. But truly, Babs, I want to make a good use of it, for God must have given it to me for that. Only," and she sighed, "it is so puzzling to know how. If I try to help the boys, they always get silly.

"Besides, it's humiliating to find oneself valued for outside appearance instead of for character and accomplishments, like Susie and Laura——"

Here the door flew open and they entered, exclaiming that they had been waiting and waiting for Amy.

"You said you were coming down to show us your gown, and here you are gossiping with Babs as if we didn't exist, you bewitching wretch! Stand up now and display your magnificence."

So Amy arose and courtesied, and swept back and forth across the room, and gave herself ridiculous airs, until Susie exclaimed:

"It is no use trying to make a comedy of yourself, for you can't spoil yourself, do your worst."

"Yes," assented Laura, "and you never before had a gown that made you look so perfectly delicious—good enough to eat!" and she punctuated the praise with a hug and kiss. "You certainly are the beauty of Borderville, the peerless pearl of the Morrison collection." And as Amy made saucy faces at her: "Well, then, the disdainful daisy of——"

But further words were stifled by Amy's hand as she turned inquiringly to Susie.

"It's quite all right, dear," said the latter with a smile of admiring affection. "We are proud to have you belong to the family. But why didn't you come down-stairs?"

"She was too busy telling me what a bore it is to be beautiful," answered Barbara for her.

The sisters looked puzzled until Amy explained, adding that had she possessed the talents of either of them it would indeed be matter for self-gratulation. Laura shook her head vigorously.

"Not at all. I can understand how you feel, because I, too, find it trying to be valued for my music rather than for myself; and like you I, too, suffer from the paradoxical condition of contempt for the flattery which still I long for. But I have something in addition which you escape. I suppose it would be called 'the musical temperament,' that convenient excuse for all sorts of eccentricities. There are times when my moods and tenses almost shipwreck me; when I am so depressed, or so irritated, or so uplifted that I can hardly control myself."

"But you never show it!" exclaimed Barbara in amazement.

"Thank you, Babs," and Laura patted her hand. "That is good of you, and a wonderful comfort to me. But I should show it badly enough if it had not been for mumsie. She made me face the fact that it was unalloyed selfishness to yield to my moods; that my talent was given to be a source of enjoyment, not of torment, to others. Oh, I assure you, she spared me neither plain speaking nor ridicule."

"What would we have done without mother!" exclaimed Amy. "I am sure I should have become a feather-brained peacock."

"Then you don't like being musical, Laura?" queried Barbara, sorely puzzled over all these revelations.

"Oh, but indeed I do. It is my joy and delight. But I believe that every blessing, however perfect,



brings with it strain and temptation, because of our own unfitness. I don't know how to express it, but it seems like this—we are either too small to contain it, or too stupid to use it properly, or so selfish that it becomes a curse.”

Susie was listening with a rather pensive expression, when Amy turned to her abruptly:

“Come now, reticence personified, we have all been laying our hearts bare, what have you to confess?”

“Not much that is creditable, I fear. I fully agree with both of you as to the responsibility and the temptation that the possession of any talent involves. Not that I have any actual talent; I only have a faculty for concentrating my mind and for grasping and remembering what I study. That and a passion for acquiring knowledge are my outfit. The temptation in my case is to do with my mind what a greedy boy does with his body at a Thanksgiving dinner. Of course knowledge absorbed for the mere pleasure of absorbing it is plain mental gourmandizing; but it is actual pain to exercise self-restraint when I get interested, and to take time from study to do something for some one else—ugh! that *is* self-abnegation indeed! That is why mother has advised me to take up teaching for a while, so that I may accustom myself to sharing my blessing with others. Mother has been no end of help in making me see the arrogance and selfishness of intellectualism for its own sake. And father, and you girls, and Mark have all been a lot of help to me. Don't suppose I haven't seen how you all squarely face your spiritual enemies and battle with them.”

With the exception of Laura they had apparently

forgotten Barbara's presence, but Laura glanced smilingly toward her and said:

"Every one of the Morrison family has been a help to me."

"Not I?" questioned Barbara involuntarily. Laura flushed; she had not expected to be taken up so promptly, and to give an honest reply required no little courage. But with a winning graciousness she said:

"Yes, Babs, you too. You are feeling so differently about things from what you did a while ago that you will know I do not mean it unkindly, dear, when I say that the gloom your moods used to cast over the whole family, and the tears they often brought to mother's eyes, and that look of desperation to father's face, roused all my determination to fight my own moods to the death; and to use my music to restore calm and happiness to the household." Then playfully seizing in both hands the crimson face Barbara was turning to the wall, she went on: "But now that you are changed—oh, yes, you are—perhaps I shall feel free to take my turn at letting out my temperament upon occasion. I assure you if I do you'll get some lessons in high dramatics, Miss Chink-Filler; for as Mary says: 'I suttinly has my own invidious feelin's.' I suppose she means 'individual.' "

Barbara, with an effort, gulped down the "invidious feelin's" that Laura's frankness aroused, and joined in the general laughter. After the girls had left, she did some serious considering, and admitted that their paths had some thorns as well as her own; but not nearly as many—dear me, no. Still, the situation was making for mutual understanding, and this she began to covet as never before.

## CHAPTER IX

### ACTION AND REACTION AND THE CONSEQUENT BRUISES

**B**ARBARA started for school with self-confident enthusiasm. Everything had gone well at home. After all, it wasn't so hard to be good; and she would show her schoolmates how to accomplish it.

At her gate she was joined by Amelia Fethering, a girl whose gossipy, mischief-making nature caused her to be generally avoided and snubbed. When especially under a cloud of disfavor, she had a way of turning to Barbara for companionship, and because she was the only girl who did so, Barbara, without really liking her, had tolerated her. This morning, however, she would probably have shaken her off had not Amelia greeted her with:

"Have you heard the news about Mary Ann Peters's father?"

"What news?" and Barbara felt mean as she asked it, for she knew well enough that Amelia's news was always disparaging, and she knew, too, that in this case she was willing it should be so. Amelia, quite charmed to have found an auditor, surpassed herself in the vivacity and detail with which she told how Mr. Peters had been summoned before a meeting of the directors of the Reinforced Refrigerator Company, and had been dismissed as manager, and that this and that were supposed to be the reasons, for of



course every one was sure that he had done *something*, and so he was in disgrace, and perhaps Mary Ann wouldn't be quite so free with her tongue now, etc., etc., the only element of fact in it all being that Mr. Peters had met with the directors, and was no longer connected with the business.

Upon reaching school Barbara was much surprised to find Mary Ann quite unabashed, the centre of a group of laughing girls.

"Hello, Babs," said one; "so the King's Daughters' meeting made you sick? Too bad."

Now that her opportunity had come, Barbara found herself strangely embarrassed; and as she plunged into the speech she had painstakingly prepared, her embarrassment increased, for the girls drew back from her and listened with hardly concealed antagonism, exchanging significant glances, and even smiles. Her club proposition was received in complete silence, and they began to gather up their books and turn to leave the room.

Barbara looked about for Grace Alden, on whose kindness she could always count, but she was not there, and not a single friendly glance met her own. In a voice choking with angry mortification she exclaimed:

"Well, evidently all your admiration for Mrs. Barton took itself out in words. I seem to be the only one in earnest. I suppose," triumphantly, "that that is the reason she talked so confidentially with me."

Here Mary Ann turned around long enough to remark flippantly:

"Yes, sweet saint, I don't doubt your halo quite dazzled her eyes. But as you've never shown a

glimmer of it to us, we'll just wait to see you do some chink-filling yourself before we become your disciples!"

Perhaps if Mary Ann had not used that term "sweet saint," who knows Barbara might have been able to control herself. As it was, she flung self-control to the winds, and uttered the most cruel and cutting retort she could think of in her passionate haste.

"Well, Mary Ann Peters, considering how your father's disgraced himself and been turned out of his place for what he's done, I should think you would feel like keeping quiet for once."

Mary Ann's face grew white, but she had no need to answer.

"For shame, Barbara Morrison!" "Don't speak to the horrid old thing, Mary Ann; we all know better!" cried the girls, and they surrounded her with their encircling arms, and swept her out of the room before another word could be exchanged. Even Amelia joined the vanishing group. All that morning Barbara was made to feel in their averted, frigid faces the displeasure of her schoolmates. Knowing perfectly well, but refusing to acknowledge it to herself, that she had been inexcusably brutal and cruel in thus attacking a girl who was innocent of her father's misdeeds, Barbara's ill humor increased with her discomfort, so that when at home she sat down to lunch she was very much like the Barbara of old at her worst.

She found the family in a flurry of assisting Mark, who had been summoned to join his father in Washington. When at last all were settled at the table, her mother asked cheerfully:

"Well, Barbara, how did the girls receive your suggestions?"

"They were all perfectly horrid," snapped she, "and Mary Ann Peters the worst of all. But," with grim satisfaction, "I let her know just what I thought of a girl whose father had been turned out of his place in disgrace!"

"What?" almost shouted Mark, suddenly arrested in the effort to bolt his lunch. Barbara, who thought his surprise related altogether to hearing for the first about Mr. Peters, began to repeat Amelia's account, but Mark brusquely interrupted her by asking:

"How do you know he has been turned out?"

"Why, Amelia said——"

"Never mind Amelia; what do *you* know about it?"

"Nothing but what Amelia told me; how should I?"

"How do you know Amelia wasn't lying?"

"Mark, Mark!" exclaimed his mother.

"Well, making a mistake then?" corrected he impatiently.

"Why, hasn't Mr. Peters been turned out?" asked Barbara, rather disconcerted.

Mark glanced at his watch, rose hastily, and said:

"It's nearly train time. I can only tell you this: that Mr. Peters has covered himself with glory, just as father and I, who have known of the affair from the outset, have been sure he would. It's the other side that's in disgrace; and it would be a mighty good thing if every other girl had as good reason to be proud of her father as Mary Ann Peters has. If you have spread any lying reports to the contrary, you deserve——"

Here his mother's warning glance checked him.



He hurriedly kissed them all except Barbara, saying to her:

"When you make amends to Mary Ann Peters, I may be willing to account you my sister, but not until you do!"

Barbara sat pale with dismay while the others turned shocked faces upon her.

"But Amelia said—" she began in self-justification.

"Oh, my child, my child," interrupted her mother, "how could you believe any scandal of Mr. Peters, who has been your father's best friend from boyhood, and whom we all *know* to be the soul of honor? And to speak of it to his daughter! How can I ever look Mrs. Peters in the face again? That your father's daughter could do such a thing!"

"But, mother, how was I to know that Mr. Peters wasn't, after all, a hypocrite?"

"Mr. Peters a hypocrite!" repeated Amy indignantly. "You might just as well say father is a hypocrite!"

"Besides," added Laura quite as indignantly, "even if he were, it isn't to his daughter you should mention it!"

"The cruelest insult!" exclaimed Susie.

As Barbara looked from one to another disapproving face, her old habit reasserted itself.

"Always the way," said she; "you're always down on me! I'm always the one that's done wrong. I——"

"Barbara, stop this instant," said her mother. "You are the last one who should utter reproaches. Oh, that uncontrolled tongue of yours! When will you realize that in one moment you may do mischief

with it that years cannot repair! How could you listen to such a tale in the first place, when you've told me over and over that Amelia is absolutely unreliable? And then to mention it before others! Oh, you have done a great wrong, and I fear a very far-reaching one.

"The facts are that Mr. Peters was *not* turned out, but on the contrary was urged to remain, and was offered a large increase of salary if he would consent; but for reasons which do him infinite honor he insisted upon resigning his office. I might add that there is a plan on foot to secure for him a much finer position. But of all this you must say nothing, excepting that you may confess that you were altogether wrong in every particular, and didn't know what you were talking about, and that whatever occurred was wholly to Mr. Peters's credit. Oh, what would your father say if he knew of this!"

"If you had only told me before! It all comes of your never telling me anything!" cried the girl, alarmed at this reference to her father.

"How childish of you, Barbara! Do you suppose your father or I would discuss the business affairs of others with a silly girl just in her teens, even if we were not painfully aware that that girl has a perfectly unbridled tongue?"

Barbara sat in silence until her sisters left the room, and then asked timidly: "Are you going to tell father?"

Instead of answering, her mother demanded a complete account of the occurrence. Barbara complied, but she faltered and almost broke down as, no longer under the control of passion, she began to realize what

a vulgar and mean, as well as cruel, part she had enacted.

"What would you have thought of any one who talked to you in that way?"

"Mother," said Barbara solemnly, quite subdued by the pain of her awakened perceptions, "I couldn't think worse of her than I think of myself for doing it. Do you suppose it really was I myself? Mightn't it have been some evil spirit in me that spoke for me? Something I really wasn't responsible for?"

"The old, threadbare excuse!" sighed Mrs. Morrison. "The coward's plea, 'I couldn't help myself.' Whatever fault of word or deed you may commit, at least do not descend to the poltroonery of shouldering the responsibility for it off onto some one else real or imaginary. I am willing to own that Mary Ann was very exasperating, and that a sharp answer from you would have been natural, even though wrong, but this——"

"Yes, I know what you are going to say—'This was hitting below the belt!' "

"Well, no, that was not what I was going to say, although it expresses my idea."

"If all the responsibility does belong to me," continued Barbara, "do tell me how I happened to do a thing that I so plainly see was despicable and abominable? How did I get that low down all of a sudden?"

But Mrs. Morrison knew that there was nothing sudden about it; that indeed Barbara had many times made remarks quite as "despicable and abominable" to her own sisters, and even to her mother; and that her present self-condemnation was the result



of increased spiritual sensitiveness, not of greater guilt, so she answered:

“For a number of years, whenever you’ve been angry, you have felt free to say whatever came into your head. It is impossible but that such a habit should constantly grow stronger. And now that at last you recognize its wickedness, you must brace yourself to curb it. It will be a very, very hard and painful fight; but it is now or never. You have simply *got* to face this thing. And your first step is, of course, to ask Mary Ann’s pardon——”

“Oh, mother, must I? I can’t, I can’t! She will crow over me so! I can’t.”

“Why, Barbara!” exclaimed her mother with a look of such amazed disapprobation that Barbara hid her face in her hands, “is it possible that you hesitate for a moment? I never could have believed so badly of you! I thought you would *want* to beg pardon for such an injury.”

“Oh, I can’t,” groaned the girl. “Mary Ann detests me, anyway, and I detest her; and there won’t be anything bad enough for her to say to me if I humble myself to her!”

“Very well,” said Mrs. Morrison coldly. “If you have really sunk that low, Barbara, there is nothing left for me but to *command* you to go this very afternoon and make a proper apology to Mary Ann.”

She arose to leave the room, but Barbara caught her dress and, raising woful eyes, cried:

“Mother, mother, don’t speak that way to me! If you turn against me, it’ll kill me dead! Isn’t there some other way? Isn’t there?”

“My child, can you yourself think of any other?

You have done a cruel wrong; should not you rather than your victim suffer its consequences? Would common decency require less of you?"

Barbara loosened her hold and bowed her head on the table. It was not a long struggle, but so sharp that her face was strained and white as she arose and doggedly put on her hat and jacket, and started for the door; for she had owned to herself that there was indeed no other way.

## CHAPTER X

### SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

IT happened there was no school session that afternoon; so she walked on slowly in a brown study as to where she was to meet Mary Ann and how approach her. She did not notice that she had inadvertently turned down the street on which Mrs. Gerald lived, until that lady spoke to her at her open gate.

"I saw you coming and it occurred to me that the very chance I needed had been made for me far better than I could have made it for myself. Come in; I have a note from Mrs. Barton that I want you to read."

Except for her surprise and confusion, Barbara would doubtless have declined this invitation; but, as she hesitated, Mrs. Gerald placed her arm about her and gently drew her toward the piazza steps, where she seated herself beside her, and handed her an envelope, saying:

"It has just come in this mail; read it."

Barbara took it reluctantly. She felt as if some sort of a crisis were at hand as she opened and read:

"MY BELOVED FLORENCE:

"This is the first chance I have had to write, and only a brief chance at that. But I must not postpone longer telling you that Barbara Morrison was in the



station that day we parted, and heard all of our conversation about her. That it was innocently done on her part, you must believe without the explanations for which I have at present no time.

"I will not conceal the fact that her unfriendly feelings toward you are of the strongest. But do not despair. I am convinced from my talk with her that the girl does indeed long to be different, and I am equally convinced that you can help her and that God will show you the way.

"With unbounded love and confidence, your

NETTIE."

"Well?" asked Mrs. Gerald. But Barbara slowly folded the paper in silence, and not for some moments did she answer, and then it was with downcast eyes but a tone of stubborn displeasure that she said:

"I can never forgive you; never!" and she started to rise, but Mrs. Gerald detained her, saying with quiet emphasis:

"I am not asking you to forgive me."

"Why, no, of course you haven't asked me in so many words, but I supposed that was what you wanted. If not, why did you stop me at all?"

Mrs. Gerald parried this question with another: "Do you think a man who had been robbed would ask the thief's pardon for mentioning the fact to a friend?"

"I—I don't understand," stammered Barbara, considerably shaken by the lady's manner.

"Let me explain, then. I know you didn't think of it as robbery, and yet by your cheap sneers and flip-pant ridicule you robbed me of your classmates' at-

tention and of my influence over them; and robbed of all value the lessons I had been at great pains to prepare. I realized that the good of eight girls must not be further sacrificed to the contrariness and folly of one, and so I asked for your removal."

Mrs. Gerald had spoken gently, even sadly; but Barbara, very red in the face, burst forth:

"You are saying perfectly dreadful things of me, and just because once in a while I let the girls know that I saw through their hypocrisy when they talked so piously."

Mrs. Gerald waited while the girl talked on, until breathless, of favoritism and injustice, then answered with unruffled mildness:

"I am speaking very plainly, because it would be unkind to go on thinking and saying *of* you what I am not willing to say *to* you. Besides, I see no possible way of being useful to you without putting plainly the hard truth of the case."

"But," insisted Barbara, "I don't think it is true. I wasn't as bad as you make me out; and," with increased stubbornness, "I don't believe I did harm the girls. They were as old as I and had just as much freedom as I had to think and speak as they pleased."

"Certainly, they had; and I am not defending their succumbing to your influence, and still less my inability to counteract it. I am simply stating facts."

More obstinately than ever Barbara shook her head, insisting that it was not through fault of hers that the difficulties had arisen in the class.

"Well, then," said Mrs. Gerald, "you force me to specify by giving you at least one instance—and more if you desire them. Until you are convinced of the

mischievous done by your tongue, you will never fight whole-heartedly against the spirit within which prompts your words; so I will give you one instance.

"At the time you entered the class, Mary Ann Peters was deeply interested in religious matters. She frankly avowed her desire to become a Christian, and seemed on the point of a final decision. Once she remarked in your hearing that if the character of Jesus were studied with an open mind, it was impossible not to reverence Him and love Him; and you laughed and said— Ah, I see that you remember what you said, and perhaps you remember her retort?"

Barbara bowed her shame-stricken head in assent, for she had asked sneeringly the ancient question: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" And Mary Ann's prompt retort had been: "Not on your life, if you are one of them!"

They had both exchanged further heated remarks before order was restored, and a mutually hostile attitude had been maintained throughout that and following sessions.

"That," continued Mrs. Gerald gravely, "was the turning-point with Mary Ann. When later I had a private talk with her and urged her decision, she bluntly told me that you had cured her of all desire to come out openly as a Christian. Her words were: 'Look at Barbara Morrison! She calls herself a Christian, and if religion is going to make me like her, I don't want to have anything to do with it!' Nothing I could say had any effect; her one reply was that when she saw religion had the power to make you better, she would consider it herself. She begged me not to talk to her about it, and added with tears:



‘Really, Mrs. Gerald, I’d give a lot to feel as I did a few weeks ago, but Barbara has cured me of all that!’ ”

“But,” interrupted Barbara, “they were just a few words, and I never meant them to do any harm.”

“No, you didn’t mean them to do harm. They were only idle words, to the possible effect of which you gave no more thought than a man who throws his cigar-stub into a heap of dry hay. You were simply indulging your love for cheap ridicule. It was of just such unconsidered words that Jesus spoke when He said that for every idle word that men spoke they should give account, and He made them the standard by which judgment should be pronounced in saying: ‘For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.’ ”

Barbara’s head sank lower as she muttered:

“Anyway, they were no worse, not as bad as Mary Ann said to me!”

“I am making no excuses for Mary Ann. I am not even making a point of your having begun the affair. But I am very seriously asking you to open your eyes to the false position in which you placed yourself, and the tremendous responsibility you assumed toward the other girls, when you hindered instead of helping a new adherent to come to Him whom you had publicly avowed as your Master. If those words of yours had so much influence over Mary Ann, is it not more than likely that kindly, sympathetic words from you would have settled the matter the other way for her?”

But Barbara evaded the point with the characteristic complaint:

"It is always the way that if harm is done, I am, of course, the guilty one; but if good is done, some one else gets the credit. And yet I don't believe one of the girls has been so busy laying plans for doing good as I have; a lot of good, too, and the kind that is worth while—the kind that Mrs. Barton praised. I told the girls about it and not one would have a thing to do with it. So it seems to me that, after all, I am the one who is working for Christ!"

It was evident that Barbara intended to excuse herself from all past responsibility toward others by accusing their present attitude toward herself. Accordingly Mrs. Gerald, seeing that further pressure of her point was useless, shifted her position to meet Barbara's new stand, and said cordially:

"I am very glad to hear this, my dear. It agrees with what Mrs. Barton wrote of you. Laying plans for good deeds is fascinating occupation, and I am sorry you should have met with discouragement."

The girl looked up quickly, but Mrs. Gerald was so plainly sincere that her defiant obstinacy dropped away, and she went on in a tone far less aggressive:

"I told Mrs. Barton I would work for Jesus, but how can I if nobody will have anything to do with me?"

"It will not be counted against you, dear, if having the will to work you cannot make the opportunity."

"Then I'm just to sit still and waste my time?"

"Oh, no, indeed! There are too many things you can do all by yourself for that! The so-called little things which may prove to be clues to more important work even than what you had planned. Then there is the *being*, which offers endless opportunities, and is vastly more important than mere *doing*."

"The *being*? I don't believe I know what you mean."

"It's the toughest sort of proposition to carry out," and Mrs. Gerald shook her head with a rueful smile. "It consists in making kindliness, helpfulness, cheerfulness, etc., as much part and parcel of our characters as our hearts and lungs are of our bodies. We would then be kind, even if we had no opportunity to do kind deeds—kind, though alone on a desert island.

"Why, there can be just as much difference between *being* kind and *doing* kindnesses as there is between a natural rose and an artificial one. Indeed, kind deeds are often very artificial and done only for selfish reasons."

"But I don't see any great merit," retorted the girl scornfully, "in just feeling kind and never acting it out."

"Merit aside," answered the lady, "it is a great advantage to have your heart so filled with goodness that it overflows whenever opportunities arise. It is like the trained fire-brigade ready for the emergency day or night."

Barbara again evaded the point by rising and saying bitterly: "I know you consider me a moral leper bound straight for hell-fire!"

Mrs. Gerald rose too, and placing her hands on the girl's shoulders gave her a little shake. "I think you a very contrary child, with a ridiculously stubborn determination to take all that I say wrong and first. And yet," as she slipped her hands either side of Barbara's face and lifted it toward her own, "you have so much out of which God can mould a lovable, noble girl if you will only let Him."



Barbara flushed, and almost before she knew it had returned her kiss, and the next moment was hastening toward the gate with a queer little thrill tugging at her heart.

## CHAPTER XI

### SOME HARD NUTS CRACKED, AND BARBARA GOES UP LIKE A ROCKET

BARBARA walked on breathless and confused. To have what she had considered clever, biting sarcasms coolly dubbed "cheap ridicule" and "flip-pant sneers" was a blow to her vanity; and to be considered siding against Jesus for what she had plumed herself upon as the detection and exposure of hypocrisy was a crushing blow to her self-righteousness.

Though not willing to own herself responsible for the defection of Mary Ann, she approached her house with a sense of guilt as new as it was distressing to her proud self-confidence.

At the door the maid hesitated about admitting her.

"Sure, the child is lying down with a splitting headache, and told me she would see no one. Mrs. Peters has gone to Amity, and there's not a soul in the house, and she won't eat and has been crying herself sick, and I am worrit to death over her."

"I must see her at once!" and, pushing the girl aside, Barbara ran lightly up the stairs to Mary Ann's room. She knocked, but entered without waiting for an answer. Mary Ann was lying on the couch, with her head pressed into the pillow, but started up, revealing a face swollen and red from prolonged crying. When she saw who had entered, she lifted herself to her elbow with blazing eyes.

"How dare you come here, Barbara Morrison? Get out of this room and this house this moment."

"Oh, Mary Ann," began Barbara.

"I won't listen to a word from you. You are detestable, and every girl in school thinks so. You are the most self-righteous, ill-natured, disagreeable, horrid girl I ever knew, and I don't want ever again to have anything to do with you. This is *my* room, and I tell you to get out of it! Don't you hear me?"

"Yes, but, Mary Ann, I've come——"

"I know you have come," the furious girl screamed, "and I tell you to go, and you had better do it pretty quick too." She rose threateningly, but sank back weak and dizzy.

"Please listen," pleaded Barbara.

"I won't," and she covered her ears with her hands and buried her face in the couch-pillow.

Discouraged, Barbara turned to go, and then remembering her mother's urgency, she dropped on her knees beside the couch, pulled Mary Ann's hands away, and said rapidly:

"Forgive me, forgive me, Mary Ann, for the dreadful thing I said this morning. I know now that it wasn't true, but that your father has been perfectly splendid and glorious. But even if it had been true, it would have been beastly in me to say what I did. There, now, I've done all I can to make up for it, and I'm on my very knees begging you to forgive me."

"Why, so you are!" exclaimed the other as she again raised herself on her elbow. "I never would have believed it possible, Barbara Morrison, that you would ever beg any one's pardon for the wicked, hateful things you love to say."



The other winced and drew back as if struck, but she had set her hand to this plough, and was determined to see the difficult furrow out to its end.

"You will forgive me then?" she begged.

"No, I can never, never forgive you," was the unexpected reply.

Barbara's face reddened, and a sharp retort would have slipped from her tongue had she not suddenly bethought her that these were her very words to Mrs. Gerald. She hesitated, with bowed head, while Mary Ann watched her curiously, and then she said slowly and reflectively:

"Well, I don't believe I would ever forgive you either if you had said such a contemptible thing about my father." She lifted her head, rose from her knees, and repeated: "Anyway, I've done the best I can to make up for it."

"No, you haven't," sneered the other. "Not much, you haven't."

Barbara looked such an honest surprise that her opponent condescended to explain:

"You know perfectly well, Barbara Morrison, that you said what you did before a lot of the girls, and now you sneak into my room when there is no one by and pretend to beg my pardon, while you leave the wicked slander to be repeated by all the girls who heard you."

"But they didn't believe it."

"How do you know but what they will come to believe it when they take time to think? They will say: 'It was hateful of Babs to say it, but she must have had some ground. Her father is Mr. Peters's most intimate friend, and she may have got it straight from

him.' And they will tell their fathers and mothers, and the whole bunch will discuss it, and then they will say to others: 'It came straight from Lloyd Morrison's daughter. Of course she is a hateful young minx of a creature, but for all that she would hardly be likely to invent such a thing against her father's friend; and, anyway, where there is so much smoke there is sure to be some fire.' So you see, Miss Meanness, you haven't done so awful much to atone, after all."

Barbara looked dismayed, and sat thinking; and again Mary Ann watched her curiously.

"Do you mean that you think I ought to tell the girls too?"

"Well," was the grim answer, "a really *honorable* person" (and there was an emphasis that made Barbara wince again) "would want to retract the insult where she had given it."

"Oh, you are hard, Mary Ann Peters. Tenpenny tacks and brass nails are nothing to you in hardness," cried Barbara bitterly.

Mary Ann grinned; she saw she had deeply pierced her enemy's armor of pride; but her mouth only grew the more set, and saying coldly:

"Well, I for one don't take much stock in your amende honorable, Miss Try-to-save-your-own-skin," she lay down upon the couch, deliberately turned her back upon Barbara, waved her hand carelessly, and added: "If that's all you have to say for yourself, you might as well be going, Miss Mean-as-you-can-be; but please remember that I despise you, and that I never want to hear another word from you in my whole life; *never, never!*"

But Barbara did not go. She sat perfectly silent, with the marks of a great conflict on her face. Suddenly she shivered and, breaking into sobs, cried, "I'll do it to-morrow morning," and rushed from the room. So startled was the other girl that on the impulse she sprang up to check her, and then, sinking back, murmured sceptically:

"No, no; let us wait and see; she'll never humble herself that much."

As she fled down the stairs and out of the house, Barbara made a mighty effort to control herself, and so far succeeded that she emerged upon the street outwardly calm though inwardly raging. When she had reached the loneliest road she could find, she gradually slackened her speed and fell into a painful brown study. Many a time she had complained that things always went wrong with her when she tried to do right, but now it appeared as if everything went wrong with her *because* she was trying to do right. Why, she asked, had God allowed her to sin against Mary Ann when He knew that she was sincerely endeavoring to be good, unselfish, and helpful? It was not like expecting Him, as her mother had said, to hold up the laws of nature to prevent her illness. He could so easily have held her back by some special spiritual influence from all of these mistakes she had made.

"I've never been in such a dreadful fix in my life before," she muttered. "I didn't intend to do it; it came of itself. Oh, why did He let me? He could have stopped me." Startled at finding herself actually calling God to account for her sin, she shrank within herself. "Perhaps I have been bad so long



that He doesn't care any more whether I am good or not." By this time her circuitous route had brought her out by the bench where she had sat with her father. No one was in sight; so she sat down and tried to think of some way out of the tangle. But mortification over the past and dread of the morrow stifled all connected thought.

"Oh," sighed she, "I can't do anything. I'll talk it over with mother."

So she rose and turned toward home, but paused and slowly shook her head.

"I've been a perfect nuisance to mother this whole week; and she's feeling so awfully about this Peters affair; she'll be quite desperate if I tell her about Mary Ann. It really isn't fair to worry her any more; I won't tell her a word, not if it kills me."

Then an impulse came to her with such a sense of relief that she almost said aloud: "I'll go back to Mrs. Gerald."

Mrs. Gerald looked up in surprise when the maid ushered Barbara into her cosey sewing-room; then she rose quickly and drew her toward an easy chair.

"What has happened, you poor child?"

The genuine sympathy of her tone overcame Barbara's hardly won self-control. But without appearing to notice it, the lady left the room, and soon returned with a tray bearing two glasses of refreshing grape-juice and a plate of cookies.

"There, I was feeling as if I needed something, and I think this will be the very thing for us both. Here's to your health and happiness, dear, and the chasing away of gloom."

She clicked Barbara's glass with her own, and there

was that in her smile that went to the girl's heart with a sense of comradeship and comfort.

"Oh, Mrs. Gerald, you are too good, and I don't deserve it a bit. I have been horrid to you. Really and truly, I never realized before how horrid I was. I was so—so—oh, I don't know how to explain; but it was like being so mad through and through that I couldn't seem to see what I was about."

"Not another word on that subject. We both perfectly understand that bygones are gonebys. And now tell me what has happened? You looked like a ghost when you came in." Then, seeing Barbara's hesitation, she added kindly: "But don't tell me a thing if you would rather not. Perhaps I was mistaken in thinking that something had happened since you left me."

"No, you were right," hesitatingly, "and I do want advice very, very much. I was going to talk with mother, but I hated to bother her, and then I thought of you."

Mrs. Gerald suppressed a smile at this naïve confession of willingness to save Mrs. Morrison at her expense, and asked rather gravely if it were not something the former ought to be told, but Barbara answered bluntly:

"Why, I wouldn't dream of telling you a secret from mother. I just love to tell her everything. That's the trouble, I bother her too much. I've nearly worried her to death over it already this very day, and I vowed I wouldn't say another word to her about it, not if I died of it, until it was all over and I could treat it as ancient history. You think I was a lot of trouble to you, but you just ought to see what a thorn in the flesh I am to my blessed mother!"

This was said with such gloomy earnestness that Mrs. Gerald laughed outright.

"My dear girl, what a tragedy your mother's life must be to have a daughter who loves her so much that she can't keep a secret from her. I am sure your mother wouldn't give up your confidences for the world. I only hope my Betty," glancing at the sofa where a plump three-year-old was sleeping, "will bother me in the same way. I think it is all the sweeter of you now that I know you have planned to ask me about something you would rather talk over with your mother."

"Yes, indeed, I would!" assented Barbara eagerly.

"I feel greatly complimented to be selected as your mother's substitute," and this time Mrs. Gerald did not attempt to conceal her smile. "And now let me know how I can help you."

Barbara, embarrassed, stammered: "If I tell it all— There are so many others mixed up in it— Perhaps I oughtn't to tell some—" and she paused in perplexity.

"I see, it is rather complicated. Perhaps I can help you by questions. For instance, how far back does the difficulty date?"

"Why, as far back as when I promised Mrs. Barton I would be a chink-filler."

Then she went on to say that, instead of improving, she was growing worse and worse; that temptations met her at every step, and conquered her every time; that the whole attempt was useless, for she was convinced God himself had given her up, and didn't care to have her good.

But here Mrs. Gerald interrupted her with an earnest: "Your Father in heaven not *care*! Impossible,



child. Wouldn't your father on earth care to have you good?"

Barbara lifted startled eyes. "It nearly kills him when I'm bad. Why, he is so sorry for me that—" and she checked herself on the verge of repeating that never-to-be-forgotten conversation with him.

" 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him,' " quoted Mrs. Gerald.

"What, when I'm bad?" cried Barbara.

"I thought you said it was then your father pitied you."

Barbara struggled with this new idea, and then incredulously: "But why does He let me be bad then?"

"Do you want to be good?"

"Oh, I do. I *do*." There was no doubting the sincerity of this yearning cry.

"Who makes you desire it so ardently? Who makes you hate your failures? Who makes you feel such deep self-disgust and shame?"

"You mean," and a sweet smile broke over the girl's face, "that my Father in heaven is really—" and she paused.

"Yes, I mean that our Father in heaven gives us His Holy Spirit to awaken our longings for holiness, and to show us our sinfulness and weakness, so that we shall turn from them with true repentance."

"But why do I keep getting worse instead of better?" persisted Barbara.

"When I was a little girl, coasting down-hill was very easy, but scrambling up-hill was a hard struggle," said the lady for answer. Then catching up a spool of heavy linen thread, she quickly bound Barbara's two hands together and said: "Now break it."

Barbara made vain efforts, and shook her head.

"It is meant for an illustration I know, but what does it mean?"

"That not until we try to resist bad habits do we know how strong they are; and it is only after repeated efforts that we bring enough force to bear upon them, and then it hurts; oh, how it hurts!"

Barbara, looking thoughtfully at her hands, tried again and again until her wrists were chafed and then with a determined effort, snapped them free.

"You poor child!" exclaimed Mrs. Gerald as a drop of blood appeared where the skin had been broken, but Barbara laughed joyously.

"Never mind that, it will be a reminder that as long as I really do succeed, no hurt is of consequence."

Her face had brightened until she looked like another girl, and her hostess said impulsively:

"Come back into my class, Barbara!"

Then a shadow fell, and she shook her head somewhat grimly.

"No, that would be making things too comfy and easy. I don't like Mrs. Spencer and I don't like her class, but I'm going to stay put and swallow the disagreeables!"

"Goosey," said Mrs. Gerald, affectionately giving Barbara's ear a little tweek, "don't make the mistake of courting martyrdom. You will have enough to endure without inviting difficulties. There is no virtue in walking over burning ploughshares to goodness when you can reach it through green pastures."

Barbara looked puzzled, but she also looked stubborn, so Mrs. Gerald dropped the subject.

That evening Barbara sat glum and silent, and still

more so the next morning. So preoccupied was she that she barely noticed that her mother and sisters hardly spoke to her, though the former's glances were anxious. But at the door she turned back, blew a kiss to Mrs. Morrison, and cried recklessly:

"I'm going forth to do battle with Apollyon, and you may expect me back on a shutter pretty well sliced up!" Which enigmatical remark only increased the anxiety.

Barbara gave a little gasp when she found in the school coat-room a much larger group than had been present at her altercation with Mary Ann. Mary Ann's face lit up with a mocking smile as Barbara, walking toward her, began very distinctly, but in a voice she had made cold and hard to check its trembling:

"Girls, especially you who were here when Mary Ann and I had our row, I want to tell you that what I said to Mary Ann was absolutely without foundation; that I know on the best possible authority that Mr. Peters has done something so splendid that any girl living would be proud of him for a father, even though she might prefer to keep her own. It was an abominable thing for me to say because I heard it from Amelia, and we all know that she's not to be trusted, and of all others I ought to have known better than to believe anything against my father's best friend. I am sorry now I didn't knock Amelia down for saying it. I am still more sorry that I didn't bite off the tip of my tongue before repeating it. I went to Mary Ann's house and begged her forgiveness; but she didn't take any stock in my asking private pardon for a public insult. So now, Mary Ann, I confess to



you that I was a wicked, cruel girl; won't you please forgive——”

But the rest remained unsaid, for Mary Ann had flung herself upon Barbara's neck in a passion of compunction, crying:

“Babs Morrison, I'll never again say that you're not a Christian. I never, never could have done what you have——”

Barbara disengaged herself and, looking the other over appraisingly, said with disconcerting frankness:

“Well, I don't believe you could, Mary Ann, for you really are as hard as a pound of tenpenny nails!”

“There, there, you two will get into trouble again if you're not stopped,” and Grace Alden seized each by the back of the neck and pushed their faces together, laughingly urging them to “kiss and be friends,” which they did, and were clapped by all the other girls, except Amelia, who had slunk out of the room.

“Why,” whispered Grace as she and Barbara went out with arms interlaced, “did you drag Amelia into the matter?”

“She put herself into it first of all, and I didn't feel any call to shoulder her share of the mischief.”

From which it appears that Barbara had not yet attained to any great height of magnanimity.

Later she stopped at Mrs. Gerald's. “Just to tell you,” she explained, “that Mary Ann Peters and I are friends; at least Mary Ann is, but I don't believe I shall ever care much for her.”

“You are not obliged to,” was the laughing reply; and immediately Mary Ann seemed less repellent.

Arrived at home, Barbara stood behind her mother's

chair and, facing her sisters, said defiantly: "I've begged Mary Ann Peters's pardon before about twenty of the girls, and have explained how fine her father is, and she thinks I'm the best ever. So now you needn't treat me like a criminal any longer, for I've stood all I'm going to!"

Her mother turned and clasped her in her arms and exclaimed with a glance that challenged her other daughters: "My darling child, I am proud of you!"

"So say we all of us!" chimed in Laura. Then they all surrounded her and kissed her, and she, feeling strangely humble under their approval, colored and laughed, and told them not to be silly over it, for of course it was the thing to do, only she hoped she wouldn't have to do it again in a hurry. Then she hastened to give them an account of the maiden address by a visiting member of the school board, and did it so comically that her sisters recognized for the first time that she, "Barbara, of all persons!" they said among themselves, had a true sense of humor. But her mother warned her:

"Take care now that you have bobbed up out of the depths not to crack your head against the sky."

"Oh, let me go uppity up while I'm about it; you know I'll be down out of sight soon enough."

And she spoke prophetically.

## CHAPTER XII

HAVING GONE UP LIKE A ROCKET, BARBARA COMES  
DOWN LIKE A STICK

“DON’T tell me!” exclaimed Amy one afternoon in a remarkably ferocious voice for her, “that there are not malicious spirits around! If there are not, how did it happen that Miss Barns left unfinished the very dress I am to wear this evening, and left me short on ribbon, buttons, and sewing-silk? What am I to do? I must sew like mad to get it done even if I had the materials, and how am I to get them when not one can be bought nearer than Bridgeton?”

Her mother and sisters looked up in helpless sympathy. There had been a whirlwind of summer dress-making in the house for a week, and all were worn out with it and the sudden hot wave.

“You might wear that lovely new spring silk,” suggested her mother.

“Oh, mother, in all this heat! And this thing of coolness and beauty so nearly ready! I wonder if I could get the ribbon and the rest by telephoning? Do you suppose they would send a messenger with them? But even then, how to make sure of the color?”

“Why can’t I go to Bridgeton for them?” asked a voice from the adjoining room.

They could hardly have been more surprised if a



bomb had exploded, for it was Barbara who spoke; Barbara who had never before been known to make such an offer; indeed, who always went on an errand as if to execution. She now appeared in the doorway saying:

"A train goes in twenty minutes, and if you will give me the sample, I can be back in plenty of time for you to finish the dress."

"You blessed creature," cried Amy. "Here is your sample, but I can't bear to have you go in this heat!"

"That's nothing! What do you want?"

"Three yards of one-inch ribbon, one spool of silk, and one dozen silk buttons, all to match the sample. Here, just wait while I write it down for you."

"Nonsense; as if I couldn't remember. One yard of ribbon——"

"No, no; three yards of ribbon, one——"

"Yes, I know; one spool of thread, and two dozen——"

"No, *one* dozen buttons," shrieked Amy after her down the stairs, trying to write the order as she vainly raced to overtake her, and but half satisfied to stop when Barbara called back from the gate the correct amounts.

Once on the train, Barbara began to enjoy herself. She did not really mind hot weather, and it was far pleasanter going on a shopping trip than trying to read while her conscience clamored that she ought to be helping with the sewing. Truth to tell, her conscience had become exceedingly troublesome of late by nagging at her to do this and that for others, when all she wanted was to do something for herself. Yet each yielding to its compulsions gave a stimulus to

life—a thrill, as if she were on the verge of the great adventure; although what the great adventure consisted in she had not an inkling.

As the train sped on, her self-gratulations at having escaped a distasteful service through the substitution of a welcome one were interrupted by the entrance from the forward car of the “young man who smiled.” She rose and beckoned impulsively, and he courteously lifted his hat and came forward.

“Do tell me,” said she eagerly, “how the poor lame boy is? Was he seriously hurt?”

“He seems to have fully recovered physically,” with a slight emphasis on the last word.

“So it wasn’t serious, after all?” And Barbara dropped back into her seat with a sigh of relief.

He looked at her speculatively, and then sat down in front of her and continued:

“In one way it wasn’t serious, but in another it was about as serious as it was possible to be.”

She leaned forward with an “Oh!” which sounded like a groan, covered her eyes as if to shut out the sight of disaster, and then faced the astonished man as she impetuously exclaimed:

“It can’t be! It can’t be! How can it be when I didn’t mean it? Why, I didn’t really know anything about it when I did it! You know I didn’t! You said so yourself! Oh, stop looking at me like that; you have known all along that I was the one who knocked the poor boy down. Or,” with a hopefulness that besought confirmation, “perhaps it wasn’t I, after all? You said you saw the girl who did it.”

“Yes, it was you. But how did you find it out?”

“Oh, it came to me that night. I woke up and

found I knew all about it. I suppose the knowledge was sent to me as punishment for my carelessness; and now I'm being punished worse!"

In her distress she was oblivious to the fact that he was a total stranger; but he, considerably embarrassed, said cheerfully, "Oh, no, you mustn't look at it that way," and began to open the newspaper he had drawn from his pocket. Barbara put up a detaining hand.

"Don't read yet," she pleaded. "Please, please tell me all about it."

"But you take it so hard," he objected.

"I shall take it a thousand times harder if you don't tell me."

Convinced that she spoke truly, he laid the paper down. "I suppose," he ruminated, "the heat makes her so excitable, and, after all, she isn't much more than a kid."

"In what way was it about as serious as possible?" she urged excitedly.

"There, there, I really can't talk about it unless you control yourself. You know it won't do for you to work yourself into hysterics before all these passengers; some are beginning to stare already."

This had the desired effect, and he proceeded cheerfully.

"The lame boy, Will Parsons by name, was taking his examinations for a scholarship in the Amity Tech. and had only one more to take; but not being a strong fellow, that shake-up put him temporarily out of commission. In fact, the doctor kept him in bed for three days; and by that time it was too late for the examination, and the scholarship went to another boy



who until then had been out of sight behind him in the competition."

"But why can't he enter without a scholarship?"

"Because his father is a clergyman with a large family and a small salary, and can't afford to pay Will's way through the Tech., and Will hasn't the health to work his way through.

"It's a double pity, because he has a genius as well as a passion for chemistry; but he has had to give up his ambition in that line, and will probably have to content himself with night-school study and daytime care of a druggist's soda-water fountain, with nothing better to look forward to than being a drug clerk."

"Oh, no," exclaimed Barbara, who had brightened as the tale darkened; "my father, Mr. Lloyd Morrison, is the president of the Tech. board of trustees, and I am sure he can do something when he gets back from Washington. Just give me Will Parsons's address."

"Whew!" whistled he, jotting down the address, "that sounds something like. And now tell me how your patient fares?"

"My patient?" queried she uncomprehendingly.

"Yes, Mrs. Martin."

"Mrs. Martin?" as uncomprehendingly as before.

"Yes, the heavy lady whom you stood supporting as our train steamed out of Borderville that memorable evening when you distributed knock-down arguments so liberally. Surely you remember."

"Oh, that thing!" contemptuously.

"Yes, that thing!" mimicked he.

"I don't know what has become of her and I don't want to," retorted Barbara.

"Why this scorn for the heavy lady?"

"Why, she stood there and whimpered like a baby; great big fat thing!"

"Well, even big fat things have nerves; and her acting like a baby would indicate that hers had received a severe shock."

"That's just what mother said."

"Your mother was right, too. I'm a medical student, and it is my special business at present to study the effect of nerve-shock. But do you mean to tell me seriously that you have made no inquiry as to how Mrs. Martin is?"

"Why, no, why should I? She was only a coarse, common thing, you see."

"I see," exclaimed he indignantly, "that this is a case of outright, downright snobbishness." Then undeterred by Barbara's look of wrath: "Do you think that a girl who is rough and heedless is so very much superior to her victim just because the latter is uncouth? If you do, I must say I don't agree with you."

Barbara strove to be severe and dignified, but only succeeded in being brusque, as she said:

"I don't even know who you are, and you haven't the slightest right in the world to say such things to me!"

"Of course I haven't; but if you did know me, you would be thankful that I don't say worse things. If you are acquainted with Mrs. Gerald of your town, you will easily learn that her precious nephew is greatly given to the plainest sort of plain speaking."

So he was Mrs. Gerald's nephew! Truly, the situation was becoming too much for Barbara, and she

sprang up and rushed for the door as the train stopped. In an instant she was on the platform and hurrying up the street, only to discover too late that she had dismounted at the wrong station. There was nothing for it but to go on by trolley; stifled by dust from passing auto-trucks and scorched by the sun; a wailing infant on one side, and a sticky child munching peanut brittle on the other. Arrived at Bridgeton, there was no time for the leisurely walk through the town and the ice-cream soda she had counted upon and now felt doubly the need of. She dashed into the store and pitched the sample onto the counter.

"Here," peremptorily, "I want right away one yard of ribbon three inches wide, three dozen silk buttons, and three dozen spools of sewing-silk exactly that shade. Hurry, or I'll miss my train."

The saleswoman pounced on the sample.

"One yard, you said?"

"Oh, yes, yes; one yard three inches wide."

The ribbon was snipped off.

"Three dozen buttons?"

"Yes, yes. Didn't I tell you so? Do hurry."

"But are you sure that it was three dozen spools of silk you wanted?"

"Of course I am. The order was all in threes and dozens."

"But we only have *one* dozen," said the clerk.

"Well, give me them then; and, for mercy's sake, do hurry. What's the price?"

But when told it, Barbara did not have enough money.

"Never mind," said the saleswoman, "I'll charge it. I knew you the instant you came in; you're the



daughter of Mrs. Lloyd Morrison, of Borderville, and she's a charge customer." Then, at the girl's look of surprise: "Oh, I saw you at the station when you knocked so many people down. Some folks said a clean dozen; but, sakes, how people do talk! I saw it, and it wasn't a half-dozen. You did it as slick as——"

But, with one stare of angry amazement, her audience had fled. It was a decidedly tempestuous Barbara who later burst in upon the peaceful sewers and, flinging the parcel into Amy's lap, exclaimed fiercely:

"There are your old things; and I *never, never*, NEVER want to go into Campbell's store again, if I live to be a hundred."

"But, Babs," cried Amy, "I said *three* yards of *one*-inch ribbon."

"You didn't say any such thing. I guess I know what you said; and I got every single thing except the three dozen spools of silk, and I couldn't get those because they only had one dozen in the store. It was a most ridiculous order, anyway."

And she flung out of the room as tempestuously as she had entered, leaving Amy half laughing and half crying over the heap in her lap. Mrs. Morrison rose and, taking the list Amy had written, followed Barbara.

"What does this mean?" she asked in much displeasure. "Amy told you the order plainly enough, and everything is wrong."

"It isn't wrong a bit: it's just exactly as she told me," insisted Barbara. "One yard of three-inch ribbon, three dozen buttons, and I told her I couldn't get the three dozen spools of silk because they didn't have them."

"Barbara," said her mother, "you are not to contradict in that way. We all heard the order and here it is written down, only you wouldn't take the list. You must read this," continued Mrs. Morrison, as the girl turned her back on the paper. Sullenly Barbara did as bidden.

"Well, anyway," she stubbornly insisted, "I didn't hear it that way if the rest of you did; and the next time Amy can do her own shopping instead of making me her pack-horse this blistering hot day. If she wasn't going to be satisfied, she needn't have made me go."

Her mother laid a cool hand on the burning forehead, and softly turned the averted face toward her, and under the searching gaze of those clear eyes the proud spirit broke.

"Oh, don't look that way, mother; please don't," and she caught the soft hand and pressed it to her lips. "I've had such a hideous, hideous time!" And she dropped face down on the bed.

"I was sure something had happened," soothed her mother as she brought a cool wet cloth. "There, slip off your dress, and I will darken the room, and with this on your forehead you will soon feel better."

"Oh, you sweet, sweet saint," murmured Barbara gratefully, "why don't you 'trounce' me?"

"Nonsense!" was the only answer vouchsafed as Mrs. Morrison went out and softly closed the door. The next first aid administered was to the greatly perturbed Amy.

"Use the ribbon as a girdle," her mother suggested, "and give up the little bows; and as long as you have enough buttons and silk——"

"Enough! Oh, motherkins," and Amy leaned back in her chair to laugh, "how can I do without those other two dozen spools?" And then they all laughed, until Susie wiped her eyes, saying:

"To-morrow I have to go to Bridgeton for my history lecture, and I'll take back the superfluity of supplies."

Meanwhile Barbara's heated head and heated feelings cooled rapidly, though disquieting thought made calm impossible.

She reviewed with much mortification the conversation with "the man who smiled."

"By this time he's the man who laughs," she thought, "and he is simply shouting over my ridiculousness. Oh, why am I such a touch-and-go creature? Habit again, I suppose. But what is one to do with a habit like that, that has you down and beaten before you even know it's around? Dear me, and now I suppose I ought to beg Amy's pardon for my mistake. Oh, I'm sick, sick, sick of begging people's pardon, and I should think they would be sick of having me do it. Well, the sooner it's done the sooner it's over."

And she slipped to her feet and went to the door.

"Amy," she began almost before she had opened the door, "I suppose I ought to beg your pardon for my mistakes; so——"

"No, not at all," interrupted Amy decidedly. "I absolutely forbid it. It would embarrass me most horribly, and then I might make the mistake of sewing on these three dozen buttons instead of the one dozen needed; and if I did, no punishment would be bad enough for you."



"Slip into something cool, Barbara," said Susie with her kindly smile, "and come and help us, like a dear."

"Yes," said Laura, "do, childie, and I will tell you something ever so nice."

And Barbara did and Laura did; and the ever-so-nice news was that their father was due that evening.

"And mother and you will have him all to yourselves," mourned Amy, "for we shall all be at Mrs. Gerald's to meet that young sprig of a nephew who is fitting himself to be a medical missionary."

Barbara gasped.

"What did you say?" asked Amy.

"I didn't say anything," and she went on sewing rapidly and thinking more rapidly.

"What is the dear boy's name?" drawled Laura, but no one knew.

"'My nephew' is the only name I've ever heard him called by," said Susie, "and I have an idea"—and her voice sank to depths of awestruck mystery—"that he is all and much—oh, yes, much, much more than it is possible for a nephew to be."

"You will have to do the talking, Susie," said Amy. "I shall be too 'scart,' as Mary says; and Laura says she's too tired. She always declares she can't talk in hot weather."

"No," Laura smiled wanly, "I not only can't talk to the prodigy but I feel as if I shouldn't be able to breathe in the rarified atmosphere of his presence."

"Lie down a while, dear," said her mother anxiously; "you are looking very white."

"Nothing but white heat, mother; but if it worries you, I will rest a while."

Laura went quickly to her room, snatched at a bottle of smelling-salts, and sank onto a couch with one hand pressed against her heart and the other holding the bottle so that she could inhale deeply. Even her lips grew white as she fought against the increasing faintness. Then as a touch of color returned to her face, she crept by slow steps to her washstand and with trembling hands mixed a dose of restorative, then softly but swiftly crept back to the couch. A cold dew broke out on her forehead and around her lips, and she had to brace the hand holding the salts, it shook so. But slowly the gray, pinched look passed away, and she breathed more evenly.

"Yes," she promised herself, "I will see the doctor to-morrow," and so sank into a sleep of sheer exhaustion.

## CHAPTER XIII

### BARBARA GETS A NEW LIGHT ON THE MEANING OF SERVICE AND TRIES AGAIN

“**L**AURA,” said her mother at the supper-table, “would it not be better for you to stay home? You certainly look far from well.”

“Oh,” very carelessly, “you know, mother, how the heat always fags me, and now that the breeze has sprung up, I shall be quite all right.” And then to turn attention from herself: “But, Babs, what’s your brown study about? You’ve not spoken a word since we came to the table, and you are not eating a mouthful.”

Barbara colored and began to eat rapidly.

“Mother,” said she, “Mary Ann Peters is becoming too attentive. She asked to-day to have her seat changed so that she could be next to me, and she wrote me two notes. One she gave me herself at recess, and the other came in this afternoon mail.”

“Dear me, how lover-like,” said Susie. “Were they important?”

“Well, in one she asked me to come back into Mrs. Gerald’s Sunday-school class, and in the other she asked me to exchange rings. I told her ‘No’ to both. I think it’s silly for girls to be wearing each other’s rings!”

If Barbara expected questioning about the Sunday-school class, she was disappointed. The atmosphere



was too oppressive for any of them to take much interest in any topic introduced, except the wish to lounge on the piazza in the evening instead of going to Mrs. Gerald's; and the altogether unknown nephew, the innocent cause of their discontent, would hardly have felt flattered by the unanimous desire that he had gone to China or even farther before coming to Borderville. Perhaps none of the girls who voiced the wish felt it as strongly as Barbara, who sat silent.

In much perturbation she faced the probability that Mrs. Gerald's paragon nephew was "the man who smiled." Why she felt so disturbed or what she feared she could not have said; but she vehemently regretted her afternoon conversation with him, and dreaded what he might betray to her sisters of their chance acquaintance.

Barbara sat in uneasy reverie beside her mother on the porch until train time, and then started down the street to meet her father. As she saw him approaching, a great shyness came over her, the outgrowth of that unfortunately dominant self-consciousness which unduly magnified the importance of every incident connected with herself. Would her father have repented his conversation with her? Would he feel that she had, as it were, surprised his hidden feelings, and show resentment? Or was he longing to see this daughter, so specially his daughter, as she chose to think—longing to hear how she had prospered and what had befallen her? Her steps quickened as she imagined his eager interest and craving for information.

"Father!" she cried, as he turned the corner, and

she flung her arms around him with the embrace of exclusive ownership. But he quickly extricated himself, and asked in a tone of alarm:

"Your mother? Is anything the matter?"

"No, of course not. What made you think so?"

She tried to take some of his parcels, but he set her aside.

"No, no, I want to get to your mother as soon as I can. You're *sure* she is all right?"

Barbara repeated her assurance and her question.

"Why am I afraid?" he said, and then laughed lightly as Mrs. Morrison came in sight descending the steps. "Blest if I can tell, unless because it's the first time you ever came to meet me, and that seemed ominous. But, then, it's always so; the last hours of a journey are purgatory to me for fear some disaster may have overtaken her before I can see her again. I haven't had a thought for a soul but you these two days," he cried as he caught his wife in his arms. "This time I was sure something would have gone wrong with you just because I was starving for you, and it began to seem outside the possibilities of human felicities that I actually should have you all to myself again safe and sound."

"Sh-h, you silly fellow," said Mrs. Morrison softly, glancing toward Barbara.

The latter had paused a moment in astonished silence, and then she picked up the suitcase her father had dropped and started for the house.

So he had not been doing any of the thinking about her she had imagined. Probably he had actually forgotten their conversation! He wasn't even pleased that she had hurried to meet him, only frightened

lest it meant bad news of her mother! Why, he didn't care or even know that she, "his so special daughter," was lugging his heavy suitcase! And, worst of all, the mother on whom she placed her implicit reliance had forgotten all about her, and did not care if she did strain herself with her all-too-heavy load. But here she was mistaken.

"Put down the suitcase, Barbara," called her mother; and then remonstratingly: "Really, Lloyd, it is much too heavy for her."

"Drop it, Babs," commanded he, "and take these bundles. I must have one hand free to hold on to your mother and make sure she is not a spectre in her white gown."

Barbara seized the things he handed her and hurried into the house; and, conscious she would not be missed, ran up to the upper balcony to face her disillusionment. This had been completed by a few phrases she had overheard—something about the most terrible strain of his life, that he really had forgotten there was a person in existence but his wife, and had longed insatiably for the strength and comfort of her presence to help him through.

Barbara's first feeling was wounded affection, the next wounded vanity. She began to sink into one of her most dismal moods, when her father's declaration of longing again came to mind, and she straightened up with the impetus of a new conception.

Why, yes, that was it; he had not longed for the one he had tried to help, but for the one who always helped him. Of course that was what she herself did when in trouble—she longed for her mother, sometimes for Mrs. Gerald, oftener for Mrs. Barton; and



if perchance for one of her sisters or a schoolmate, it was sure to be the one who had most recently assisted or encouraged her in some way. This, then, was the secret of winning love—helpfulness. After all, that was what Mrs. Barton had said, and that Jesus had come for that purpose, “to minister unto.” Then another thought flashed into her mind—that Jesus did not minister *in order to win love, but because His own abounding love had to manifest itself.*

So, then, this was why His gifts were free gifts—not even in the coin of love was He bartering for returns. She let her mind run down this new roadway of insight, and her next discovery was that her mother’s love also was unselfish, never pausing to calculate whether ministrations would bring return, and never pausing in loving and giving when the return was withheld. So, then, was this the way she must do? How stupid she had been not to take in that this was exactly what each of them—her mother, Mrs. Barton, Mrs. Gerald—had tried to show her; while all the while she had worked with an eye to some ultimate gain to herself in popularity, approbation, or self-satisfaction.

This recognition of her self-seeking motives marked an epoch for Barbara, a distinct break with her past attitude, and she was so absorbed in the novelty of thoughts with nothing of self in them that for a few moments she did not notice that a carriage had stopped before the house. Then the confusion of voices aroused her. A gentleman had just helped Susie out of the carriage, and her mother’s alarmed voice was questioning and Susie replying that it was nothing to be alarmed about, but Laura had had a

fainting turn at the piano. Then Laura was helped up the steps, saying in a tremulous voice: "Only the heat, mother dear; I'll be all right in a moment."

Barbara sped down the stairs, but immediately shrank back into a dark corner of the hall, for the gentleman who with her father was supporting Laura to the living-room couch was "the young man who smiled." Laura sank among the pillows, looking very white but bravely laughing as she extended her hand, saying:

"Thank you so much. I am repenting in sackcloth and ashes for having made such a nuisance of myself. You've been too good, Mr. Sargeant."

"Oh, I'm the one to do the repenting," asserted he. Then to Mrs. Morrison: "She had already played several times and I begged her for a special favorite. I ought to have seen how tired she was; but I get fairly music-mad when I listen to such an artist."

"Come in some time when it is not so hot and I will give you all you can stand," promised Laura.

The next day was cool and bright, and Laura declared "she felt as good as new," though her frequent resort to the couch belied her words. Barbara gathered from their reports that her sisters had found Mrs. Gerald's nephew, young Bob Sargeant, quite worthy of his aunt's praise. Seemingly, he had not mentioned having met Barbara.

"He kept looking at you, Amy," teased Susie.

"It didn't prevent his talking a lot with you, and quite devoting himself to Laura."

"To Laura's music, you mean," corrected the latter.

"And he would have talked to you too, Amy, if you had let him," persisted Susie. "What made you

so very offish?—you who are the social star of the family.”

But Amy could give no reason except that having heard him so much lauded had prejudiced her, and that she greatly objected to his name “Bob”; it seemed so disrespectful to his calling.

A few days later Barbara started out to seek the abode of Mrs. Martin’s nephew and fulfil her long-neglected duty of inquiring after that injured lady. By good luck she found the nephew in the same spot she had found him before, and, as then, engaged in unhitching his horse.

“Oh,” he greeted her with twinkling eyes, “so you’re the young lady boss who made Aunt Louizy so all-fired mad; said she’d never been sassed like you did in her whole blessed life before. I jest this minet see her off on the train.”

“Has she been here again?” asked Barbara with flushed cheeks.

“Agin! Why, she ain’t been away till to-day.” Then seeing the girl’s surprise, he cheerfully continued: “She was pretty bad hurt; I can tell you that ’tain’t no joke for a hefty party like she is to be knocked about. For one while me an’ my wife thought she was going to be bedrid on our hands. But she started off pretty spry this afternoon, and I guess ’tain’t muchn now but a touch of rheumatiz that ails her. The young fellar that helped her onto the train called a day or two back, and, gee, but she was glad to see him. Did you know he was going to the heathen Chinees to practise medicine on their bodies and souls? Too bad, I say, to fling away good American manhood like that, and I told him so. And would you believe



it," and he chuckled with keen relish of the argument, "he argued till he convinced us all it was just a ge-lo-o-rious thing for him to do, and my wife made him stop talking; said she was scart he'd get me to come hiking after him."

Babs's color came and went. "Did Mrs. Martin talk with him?"

"Did she? You bet she did. Had it all out about the gal that knocked her flat, and then all about you, and how you ordered her about and told her if she didn't shet up you'd leave her to herself."

"I never told her to 'shut up,'" cried the girl angrily, "and your aunt is a dreadful old woman to tell such lies!"

"Now, now, miss," said the nephew, shaking his head, "p'raps you didn't use them identical words, but it was the sense of it she was gittin' at, and you sure did give the poor old thing the rough side of your tongue."

"Not one bit more than she deserved," and with head held high Barbara quickly walked away.

"Sho', now," said he with again the twinkle in his eye, "I've went and made you mad." But she did not turn, and he chuckled unrepentedly as he remarked to his horse: "Wall, Sal, these female gals is the limit. Big and little, old and young, thick and thin, the limit, I say."

Meanwhile Barbara was seething with angry disgust. How could she have let the creature go on? Why hadn't she walked away at once? And why should just that one little (well, perhaps not exactly little, but certainly unimportant) act of carelessness on her part have had such persistent power to fol-

low and make her miserable? And why, above all things, was it continually setting her in the worst possible light before the man with a name that Amy had declared disrespectful to his calling? She didn't care a straw for him, but if he repeated all this to his aunt, where was her standing with that lady, for whose good opinion she was becoming increasingly desirous? So she wandered toward home in fretful disquietude, until, arriving at her father's office, a sudden impulse made her enter. Mr. Morrison looked up in surprise.

"Father," she began diffidently, "forgive me for interrupting you, but I thought you'd be coming home to dinner soon, and perhaps you'd let me walk with you. I have something in particular I want to ask you about."

He glanced at the pile of papers before him, and then sweeping them into a drawer and turning the key, he said:

"You're a blessed interruption, Babs. I was positively worked out and was only muddling things. Yes, come along; we'll go the longest way 'round and get the cobwebs blown out of our brains down by the river."

All Barbara's discontent fell away and, full of delighted pride at her father's reception of her, she almost danced at his side.

"Now," said he, "out with it," and he smiled down at her with a new glow at his heart that this hardest-to-understand daughter had of her own will appealed to him. Encouraged by his cordiality, but still faltering not a little, the girl told very humbly of the discovery that she had thrown the lame boy down and of the sad result to him.

"I thought, father, that you would be sure to think of some way in which I could make it up to him. It makes me miserable to even think of his disappointment."

"And you want to be relieved of your misery?"

There was a tone in his voice that made her look up quickly, but his face was turned away.

"After all, though," he added musingly, "I don't know as there is any harm in that."

"No, father," said she earnestly, "that isn't the reason. I do care a lot more to have something done for the poor fellow." The tears had filled her eyes. "It is bad enough to be a cripple, without having all his ambitions smashed by my horrid, horrid carelessness."

Her father looked down tenderly.

"You're right, my darling, and I think I can help here."

"I knew you would," and she seized and kissed his hand. "You are president of the board of trustees; can't you make them give him another chance for the scholarship?"

He shook his head, and she looked very downcast.

"That would not be just to the boy who has gained it," he said. "Leave it to me." She showed such disappointment that, rather hurt, he asked: "So you really can't trust me, Babs, after all?"

"Oh, I can, I can."

"I will take the train and run down and see his father this evening," he went on.

"Oh, can't I go with you?"

He shook his head and laughed, and pinched her ear.

"No, Miss Bother, you have created enough complications already."



"What would he say," thought she, "if he knew about Mrs. Martin too?"

"Now let us talk about other things," and he questioned, discussed, and jested with her until Barbara did not wonder that Amy clung to him as she did, but did wonder that she herself had never before discovered what a delightful companion her father could be. And so they came home to Mrs. Morrison on the porch, and brought a smile of extreme content to that weary lady's face.

That evening Mr. Morrison saw the young cripple's father, and the eventual result was that the boy had another, and this time a brilliantly successful, chance to secure a scholarship. Not, of course, the one he had lost, but an entirely new one, which as president of the board of trustees Mr. Morrison had contemplated founding for some months, but could not decide how it should be limited. Now it was established as a second chance for those who, through evident and unavoidable misfortune, had failed to gain the first scholarship.

"I call it," said he, "the Pick-me-up-and-try-again Scholarship; but I believe the Greek professor is going to think up some less brief and less comprehensible name for it. But no name that he can invent will befog its intent as long as it is so clearly set forth by the circumstances surrounding the case of the first winner."

With a reassuring glance at Barbara's questioning face: "I explained these circumstances to be an accident which unfitted him to finish an exam. so well begun as to guaranty his having otherwise gained the first scholarship."

## CHAPTER XIV

### BARBARA BECOMES ACQUAINTED WITH MARK

A LOAD was lifted from Barbara's mind which made her enough less preoccupied to take some note of what was going on about her, and thus it befell that returning from school the next day she observed Laura slowly descend the steps from the doctor's office, walk unsteadily, and stop to support herself by a neighboring gate. Barbara quickened her pace. "What's the matter, Laura?" she called, and wondered at the nervous start and sudden shrinking of her sister, and more still at the trouble of her face.

"Oh, Babs," faltered she, "I had hoped no one would find out that I had been to the doctor's. Promise me you won't tell mother; it will worry her so."

Barbara promised readily enough, though she added:

"She will see right away, though, that something is the matter; you look like a ghost."

Laura forced a light laugh. "That is because you startled me. Perhaps, after all, it is well you saw me, for I suppose I must have some one to help me keep my secret, and, really, I don't know any one better than you. Don't even let the girls know, will you, dear?"

This was both interesting and flattering to Barbara,

who could not remember that any of her sisters had ever before intrusted her with even a shared secret, let alone a secret that only she was to know the existence of; so she promptly promised, and quite tenderly took Laura's arm to help her feeble progress.

"I have been having these faint turns," continued the latter, "for some time, and while I did not believe it was anything serious, they were rather dreadful sensations, and I had decided to consult Doctor Hudson, even before I made a spectacle of myself at Mrs. Gerald's. Oh, that was such a mortification, I can't bear to think of it!"

"Then don't," advised the other sagely, "but tell me what the doctor said."

Laura answered with carefully chosen words:

"He said I had been practising too much, and generally overexerting myself, principally with my music, and that I had—well, I suppose you might say, come to the end of my capital of strength; and now must give up and just lounge about—really do nothing but be lazy—the miserablest sort of life to lead, and I'm disgusted with him and horribly disgusted with myself." And she looked it.

"But I don't think that is so much that you shouldn't want to tell mother." For while Barbara wished no ill to Laura, she was disappointed that the secret was, after all, so unimportant; she had expected at the least that tuberculosis might be threatening, or perhaps some strange, mysterious disease.

"Mother has enough to worry her," said Laura. "Haven't you noticed how she watches father, and how very silent he is; hardly eats at all, and hurries to his office or locks himself in his study?"



No, Barbara had not noticed, but now recalled the frequent oblivion on the part of both parents to anything going on about them; her mother so often closeted with her father, or walking to and from the office with him, and pacing the porch with him till far into the night. It was only the night before that, sleepily turning, she had heard their steps, and a long time after had awakened to hear them again.

"Do you think anything dreadful is the matter?" she asked, now thoroughly alarmed.

"No, but I am sure father has some troublesome business problems on hand, and that mother is trying to help all she can because she is afraid he may have another breakdown. In many ways father has had a very hard life of it. You are too young to remember, as I can, what a tremendous amount of work and worry he has put in to bringing up this family. I am so glad that Mark is old enough and capable enough to be the help he is. Don't look so downcast, childie; it is by no means the first time mother has helped father in business; and of course now that Mark is away, her help is all the more needed."

Barbara walked on silently, filled with self-reproach that she had been the one to have added to her father's cares so soon after he had returned home. At last she said fervently:

"Laura, I'll do everything I can. I'll look after you and wait on you as if I were a trained nurse, so that neither mother nor father shall have an atom more anxiety."

Laura visibly brightened, and while she assured Barbara that such overcarefulness might provoke the very notice she desired to avoid, she acknowledged

that she might be obliged to make a sort of "lady in waiting" of her. She warned her that if she did, it would be much against her own will and only because the doctor had been so strict and specific in his orders—she was not on any pretext to touch the piano till he saw her again, was not to walk farther than his office at any one time, was not to go upstairs more than once in two hours, and then very slowly, and by no chance was to mount two flights in succession, etc., etc.

"So, childie," with a pleading look, "you won't get impatient and feel that I am just lazy and selfish if I do ask you to do considerable running for me, even when I look well and plenty able to wait on myself?"

Barbara scoffed at such an idea, and really felt of considerable importance to have become so necessary to Laura. But with this slight admixture of self-glorification there was also a generous glow that proved her sincere entrance upon the pathway of service.

"A really, truly chink-filler," she smiled to herself.

That very evening she had an opportunity to exercise her office in an unexpected way. Laura was lying on the couch in the living-room while all the rest but Barbara sat on the cool piazza. The latter stood by the living-room window, neither willing to leave Laura alone nor yet to be shut out from the family chatting. Mark had returned home that evening, and while she and he had ignored each other, not even exchanging greetings, she felt the flutter of excitement among the others, and wanted to hear what he was telling them of his trip. Mr. Morrison had sunk

into silence, and after watching him a while his wife called:

"I believe a little music would do us all good. Laura, won't you favor us?"

Laura immediately started to rise, saying: "Of course, if you won't ask for anything elaborate."

But Barbara forestalled her with the words: "Oh, mother, won't you let me play that last piece Laura taught me? If," deprecatingly, "father won't think it a bore to listen to it. I have so wanted to know if he thought I would ever make anything at music, and Laura says this is a good test piece. Would it bore you too awfully much, father?"

Her father roused himself to answer with a show of interest, for it was a new thing for this daughter to make a bid for his approval.

"It will be far from a bore if it isn't that classic tune I played myself when a boy. I used the index-finger of both hands, and first played up the piano, singing:

' Oh, do you know the muffin man,  
Oh, do you know his name,  
Oh, do you know the muffin man,  
Who lives in Lundy's Lane? '

and then I played down the piano, and sang:

' Oh, yes, I know the muffin man,  
Oh, yes, I know his name,  
Oh, yes, I know the muffin man,  
Who lives in Lundy's Lane.' "

"Why, father," cried Barbara joyously, "I remember you playing that for me when I was almost a baby, and I thought it and you too perfectly wonderful."



"Evidently admiration was easily earned in those days," said he regretfully.

"I wish I could hope," continued she shyly, "that you will care for my playing as much. I learned it just for you. I will see if I can play it so that you will recognize it."

He did at once as one of his favorites; and while it gave his æsthetic sense a sharp pang that Barbara should merely play what Laura had interpreted with wondrous insight and skill, it touched him that she should have remembered his preferences and should have toiled to gratify them. It was, after all, only toil that her playing evinced, but good honest toil, and the result was a remarkably correct rendition, with a remarkable absence of the soul of music. Her father had come inside to listen, and now sat puzzling his brain as to what he should say that would gratify without misleading her. With the last note she whirled around on the piano-stool for his verdict. So he freely expressed his appreciation of her efforts, praised her accuracy, but added that of course she couldn't ever expect to approach Laura.

"No, if I practised my fingers to the bone, I couldn't come within earshot of Laura; and if I studied my eyes out of my head, I couldn't have a mind like Susie; and if I followed all the beauty directions in all the magazines, I couldn't become a beauty like Amy; so it's no use trying to be or to do *anything!*" And she snatched the music from the rack and flung it petulantly onto the stand.

"You are right," said her father in the cold, hard tone every such display of angry envy called forth. "You can never expect to excel where they do; you

haven't their gifts. As for beauty, if you wear that sort of an expression, your face will become absolutely ugly. And if you do give up trying to advance in music and study, you will fail of even the moderate cultivation and intelligence you might attain to."

Barbara had turned her back and was drooping dejectedly over the keys—so dejectedly, indeed, that Mr. Morrison's voice took on a milder tone.

"You can no more become remarkable in your sisters' lines than I can become a millionaire, or a political leader, or an orator, or a remarkable anything that I might worthily aspire to become."

"Father," remonstrated Susie, for she and Amy had come in, "you know that that commercial analysis you prepared for the government was remarkable, and you can't say it wasn't."

"That," said he, "was the result of hard, conscientious labor. It called for nothing but honest research, careful collation of facts, patient calculation, and assiduous attention at every point. Those are all moral qualities, and just such as we every one should bring to every sort of work we undertake. No, I recognize that there are thousands of humans possessing five to ten talents apiece, while I have but one—and my one talent is a certain sort of clear-headedness that fits me for research and analytical work."

"Well, I have only one talent too," said Laura.

"And I," "And I," chimed in Susie and Amy.

Their father shook his head.

"There's where you are mistaken, and if you do not take a correct account of your stock in trade you are bound to neglect some of your talents. Laura's

musical gift is really a collection of gifts; a musical temperament, a discriminating ear, a wonderful knack at fingering, and a lot of other things. Each one of these should help her in other lines than music. Her ear should make her very keen in reading human moods and needs from the human voice; her fingers ought to be deft at many other things than the piano, and so with all the other gifts. With Susie it is similar; an extraordinarily retentive memory, a logical aptitude that leads her instinctively from point to point, a broad-mindedness that carries her right through difficulties where others flounder, etc. So with Amy; it is not only beauty of contour, color, and feature; she has also grace and graciousness, a natural taste in dress, an unerring social tact, a musical laugh, a sense of humor." He paused, smiling at Amy, who with ecstatically clasped hands drank in his words.

"More, more," she pleaded. "Oh, if those silly boys knew how to say the perfectly delicious things that you say, father, I would drop into the mouth of every single one of them like a ripe plum."

But he was now thoughtfully regarding the drooping Barbara, and went on kindly:

"I rejoice in my three gifted daughters, but I must confess that it is a great comfort to a one-talented, every-day sort of old fossil like myself to have the support and countenance of one daughter not thus gifted and a merely one-talented son."

The girls began to clamor against this designation of Mark, who stood in the doorway with his arm around his mother, but he shook his head at them.

"Dad is right," he said. "I've only one talent, and



that's a bulldog tenacity of purpose. But for that I'd have flunked in studies, athletics, and every other blessed thing I've undertaken in college or out of it. I make mistakes by the thousands, and other fellows can cover miles while I'm covering a rod; but I *won't* give up and I *won't* be beaten by them or by circumstances, or by my own blamed blockheadedness."

His father smiled. "Yes," said he judicially, "Mark's talent will make a success of him yet, and I expect to live to see it!"

"You're a wonderful success already, boy, with your mother," whispered the latter in her son's ear.

Hereupon Barbara, finding herself forgotten, whirled around and announced:

"Well, I've a talent too. Mrs. Barton said I had." And then defiantly: "Mrs. Barton said I had a talent for making people happy! So there!"

A blank silence fell, and then Mark broke it with cruel laughter and still more cruel words.

"Good heavens! she must be a wizard if she's found that out. As far as your family is concerned, you've wrapped your talent in dozens of napkins and buried it in the deepest depths."

It was Mary Ann's taunt of the concealed halo repeated. But his sister stood up and faced him, although she had to hold fast to the piano, and, looking directly into his eyes, she said slowly and clearly:

"Mark Morrison, if I become a perfect seraph of loveliness, it won't be because you ever lifted a finger to help me. And if I become the most devilish girl in this town, part of it'll be on you. When I was little you used to pester me to make me mad, and then

laugh at me; and since I've been bigger, you've hardly noticed my existence, and have never but once done a single kind thing, and that was when you sent me the snowdrop."

Then she disappeared into the next room.

"Son," said his father (oh, how Mark hated that "son" when his father disapproved), "the next time hit a fellow your own size!" and he passed on into the library. His wife turned to follow, but whispered first:

"Oh, my boy, my boy, how could you be so cruel!"

"Whew!" and Mark dropped into the rocker his father had vacated and looked around upon his unsmiling sisters. "Go it, girls, say your say. I'm ready for any bouquets you want to throw me."

"Poor, dear Babs," said Laura, almost crying for sympathy. "She is trying so hard, and does so many sweet things!"

"Yes," mocked Mark, "such as the sweet things she said to Mary Ann Peters!"

But Amy eagerly broke in with the account of the public apology.

"Well," acknowledged her brother, "that's a pretty handsome thing to have done, and seems to indicate that her stock is really looking up. Come on, Sue, out with it! You haven't said anything, but you are looking volumes!"

"I'm afraid, Mark," she answered regretfully, "that Babs is more than half right in what she said. You did use to tease her unmercifully. You know yourself you used to be punished for it."

"Yes, ma'am," very meekly, "I do assure you I can't disremember those punishments."

"Then," continued Susie, "when you went to college, Babs made a regular hero of you, and watched for your home-comings like a devoted little spaniel, although, except to snub her, you never noticed her at all, and you've gone on that way ever since."

Mark had planted his elbows on his knees and, leaning his forehead on his hands, was gazing on the floor. A short silence followed Susie's words, and then he asked very seriously:

"Do you two others agree with Sue?"

Very reluctantly Amy had to acknowledge that she feared it was all true, and Laura tried to mollify her agreement by the kindly words:

"But of course you didn't mean to hurt her, boy; it was only because you didn't think."

"That's a pretty rotten kind of an excuse, Laura; one of the sort that accuses more than it excuses." And he gave further study to the rug pattern.

Now while Barbara was out of sight in the next room she was by no means out of hearing; and finding herself so well defended, a certain glad exultation came over her which steadied the thoughts and nerves that Mark's onslaught had thrown into confusion. She looked at the clock. Yes, it was time for Laura's medicine; so with the dose she returned to the silent group, saying in a tone of which the gentleness testified to her gratitude:

"Here's your tonic, darling, and aren't you getting overtired?"

Mark looked up curiously and watched her make Laura comfortable in a reclining position, then:

"See here, kid, you seem to be getting to be some nurse, eh?"



But she ignored his advances.

"Come on, kid, don't be snippy. Let's make up and be friends."

Then she turned and faced him, but only answered, "Well?" in a tone and with a look of expectation.

"Well' what?" asked he, perplexed.

"Well, how are you going to begin making up and being friends?" Then seeing that he stared uncomprehendingly, she explained: "*I* haven't done anything to hurt *you* or to make up about. It has all been on your side."

"My word! but you do take yourself seriously, kid. How about those few remarks you made before vanishing?"

"They were the simple plain truth; weren't they, girls?"

Her sisters were both amused and indignant; they felt that Mark needed a shaking up to make him take the initiative properly, while they also felt that Barbara was hardly justified in expecting too humble a reparation from an elder brother. But Susie, the judicial, answered:

"They were certainly 'plain' enough, but they weren't the 'simple truth,' because there was exaggeration, although in the main they were the truth. But they were not the truth spoken in love."

"No," said Barbara. "It wasn't speaking the truth in love. I used to idolize Mark, but I don't honestly think I love him a little bit now." She looked him over thoughtfully. "I used to think him so handsome, but, after all, he isn't particularly handsome. Father himself says he's only a one-talented fellow, and I had considered him ten-talented at the

least; and he isn't even kind, and has no sense of *noblesse oblige* whatever."

Mark became at first furiously red, and then the humor of the situation overcame him, and he threw back his head and laughed so contagiously that they all four joined in, and every one was the better for it. He rose and put his hands on his youngest sister's shoulders, and said quizzically and almost affectionately:

"Kid, it's a comedy to see you sitting in judgment on your Big Brother. (Big and Brother both spelled with capitals, mind you.) But I'm afraid you are right, and that those capitals stand also for Brute and Bully. But there are capital B's to your title too, my lady. You were a Brave Brick to beg that catty Mary Ann's pardon, and I'll not fall short of your example. Please forgive all of Big Brother's Bullying, Brute Badness. Please now, like a ducky darling. You're a sharp little fighter, sis, and I'd rather have you fight on my side than against me."

He had his arm around her waist, and though there was much mischief in his eyes, there was something also that answered her question even while she asked it:

"Are you in earnest, Mark?"

"Never more so," affirmed he, and so she said she would forgive him, but said it with by no means the dignity she would have liked. How could she be dignified when before the words were out of her mouth he had given her a rousing kiss, and then whirled her around the room regardless of tables and chairs, out through the hall onto the piazza and down the steps to the sidewalk, and down a block of that before,

breathless and in terror of a tumble, she released herself.

"Mark," she cried, "the neighbors will think you've gone crazy!"

"Who cares if they do?" retorted he. "Kid, I dare you to race me down the hill."

Her look accepted his challenge, and in an instant they were flying down the hill, until Barbara, a clear foot ahead of him and unable to stop, flung herself into Bob Sargeant as he turned the corner.

He had extended his arms for self-protection, so that she was in them practically clasped to his breast as he staggered backward striving with all his strength to keep both her and himself from falling.

"Oh, Doctor Sargeant!" she cried in an agony of embarrassment; but he mistook the situation and, thrusting Barbara behind him, advanced toward Mark with a stormy brow and a threatening fist.

"What do you mean, you young blackguard you, chasing a girl like that?"

Mark, at first greatly astonished, burst into a guffaw of laughter, but Barbara, who saw determination in the other's attitude, caught his arm and clung to it while she tried to explain and to introduce the two.

"Oh, your brother? Of course that puts a different complexion on it," and the two young men shook hands laughingly, and as the three ascended the hill Sargeant glanced at the girl:

"No malice borne, I hope, past or present?" he queried.

"Why did you call on Mrs. Martin?" she asked stiffly.



His eyes twinkled.

"You interested yourself in my protégé, why shouldn't I interest myself in yours?"

"I hunted up her nephew myself and he told me what scandalous lies she told you!"

"It's true that the old lady was a little peppery; but I took it all with a big pinch of salt, so we had the balancing condiment, and no harm was done."

Then he devoted himself to becoming acquainted with Mark, and to relating that he was now pursuing medical studies under Doctor Hudson, so as to get some all-round helpful practice.

"The doctor sends me around town and country—principally country—to keep track of his patients, so that he can give more of his own time to the serious cases. That is why," turning to Barbara, "I am on my way to ask after Miss Laura."

"Why, is there anything the matter with Laura?" asked Mark, while Barbara strongly desired to choke their indiscreet companion.

He saw his mistake and extricated himself by claiming Laura as a special case of his own on account of the first aid to the injured he had rendered the evening at his aunt's house. "The innermost fact is," he went on, "your sister promised then to give me all the music I could stand some day, and I was on my way to ask her how soon I could come for it when Miss Barbara caromed into me."

## CHAPTER XV

### BARBARA IS UNPREPARED WITH THE WORD IN SEASON

ONE morning Barbara found her schoolmates assembled in groups before the school doors, discussing the notice posted on them that, owing to an outbreak of scarlet fever, school would be closed for the present.

They were asking each other, "Have you had it?" or were telling the names of those down with it, and that one from their own class had died the night before. Many looked anxious and frightened, while others made merry over this prospect of an impromptu vacation.

Among the former was Mary Ann Peters. She clutched Barbara's arm and drew her aside.

"Oh, Babs, I've never had it, and I've always been so afraid of it. If I get it, I know I shall die!"

Barbara, who had had it years before, felt considerable contempt for the terrified Mary Ann.

"There's nothing to be so frightened over," she said impatiently.

"But I can't help it. I'm frightened out of my wits!"

"You'd better do your best to help it. Mother says that one is much more likely to have a contagious disease one is afraid of, because fear is weakening and uses up resisting force."

"Then," said the despairing girl, "I'm perfectly sure, sure, *sure* to have it, and I'll die; I know I shall."

She had dragged Barbara along with her toward her home.

"Oh, Babs," she whispered, "I'm horribly afraid to die."

"Oh, you won't die," said Barbara petulantly, trying to wrench herself free from the clinging hands, and finding Mary Ann's fear uncomfortably contagious. "People never do die when they imagine they're going to."

But this assertion rang false in her own ears and much more so in those of her companion.

"Please, please don't leave me," pleaded the latter. "I've known you were a Christian ever since you begged my pardon before the girls, and I want you to tell me how to be one."

If the heavens had fallen, Barbara could hardly have been more amazed and dismayed. Did she indeed know how to become a Christian? Was she, after all, sure that she herself was one? What could she say to this trembling, pleading girl? What she did say was to ask her weakly if she hadn't better stop in and talk with the minister. But Mary Ann bluntly refused.

"You know me, and he doesn't begin to; and I should only be more frightened, and couldn't say a word."

"Mrs. Gerald, then?"

"No, no, Barbara. If I were drowning, you wouldn't stand suggesting that I call for some one else when you were right beside me and only had to stretch out your hand. You're just another girl



like me, and you know how girls get to be Christians, because you've done it yourself."

By this time they had reached the privacy of Mary Ann's room, and Barbara had been pulled down onto the couch by the hands that would not let her go.

Distressed and embarrassed, and yet with a new pity awakening within her, she at last responded brokenly to the repeated pleadings for help.

"I don't know how to help you. Oh, Mary Ann, I don't feel so sure that I am a Christian myself, or know anything about being one."

Mary Ann stared in surprise.

"Oh, often and often," continued Barbara, "I feel positive that I have never taken Christ for my Master, for if I really had, how could I possibly do all the horrid things I'm forever doing? If you just knew half of them, you'd say so too. Things that, that—oh, they're heathenish, barbarian—oh, they're more devilish than Christian; and even while I know it and hate myself, I do them. So there now, you know why I don't know how to help you!"

The other girl became calmer as Barbara's excitement increased.

"But what do you do when you think you aren't a Christian? You don't give it all up? I know you don't, for I can see that you keep on trying."

"Of course I don't give it all up. What do I do?" She had to think this over for a while, and then: "Why, generally I have a time of being almost crazy with misery, and making every one else almost crazy too, and then—" She hesitated; it was so very hard to have to unbare her secret soul to any one, and to Mary Ann Peters of all others, but she could not re-

sist her mutely appealing eyes, although it was almost in a whisper that she went on: "Then I begin to pray, and then I say to myself, 'If I really am not a Christian already, I'm going to be one this very minute. I *will* be a disciple of Christ's, even if He doesn't want me, and I can only tag on way, way behind the rest.' And I can just tell you this, Mary Ann, I expect I'll be nothing but a tagger-on all my life, but I'm going to keep at it, even if I die in the attempt."

Mary Ann pondered this, and then hesitating in her turn made a confession:

"I don't believe I'd be even allowed to tag on behind. You see, once about a year ago, I nearly made up my mind to take Jesus for my Master. It seemed as if I was within a minute of deciding, and then something happened and I let it all go, and I don't believe there is any more chance for me ever again."

Now it was Barbara who clung to her companion.

"Don't, don't say that. I know about it. Mrs. Gerald told me, it was my fault—" And right at that point she received a lesson in magnanimity, and of all persons from Mary Ann, the one she had called "spiteful," "as hard as brass tacks," and much else, for the latter interrupted in a tone of deep feeling:

"Oh, how could Mrs. Gerald tell you that! Even when I hated you most I never, never wanted you to hear about that; for somehow I knew it would make you unhappy all your life."

Barbara was conquered, and so completely that she did what earlier no one could have convinced her she could possibly ever do: she took the poor girl in her

arms and kissed her and gave herself up to comforting her.

"You haven't lost your chance. No one ever can. Jesus isn't like that. Why, don't you remember how He told about the shepherd hunting for the sheep; not waiting for it to follow, but following it, and hunting and hunting until He found it, and then being so awfully glad He couldn't keep it to himself but had to get a lot of others together to rejoice with Him? Then don't you remember how Jesus said He that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out. *In no wise*, Mary Ann; not even the shadow of an uncordial look! Why, I'm ever so much worse than you are to behave as I do when I promised over two years ago to be His disciple, and yet He takes me back each time. And you can't think how good my Father in heaven is to me, and how He makes me feel just through and through that He has forgiven me."

"Will you pray with me?" asked Mary Ann simply.

Barbara shrank back. No, this she could not consent to; but the look in her companion's eyes told her that it was just this that she could not refuse to do. It was a broken, mixed-up prayer, scandalously untheological, even ungrammatical; but it was the cry of a helpless child to an all-sufficient Father. And when the disjointed petition, "Please help me to help Mary Ann if I'm not too impossible, and anyway please help her Yourself," ended, Mary Ann took up the pleading with the declaration that she, too, was determined to follow the Good Shepherd whether He wanted her to or not.

After that neither girl cared to talk much more, but



they kissed silently, and Barbara turned to go. Then noticing Mary Ann's hands, one at throat and the other on forehead, she asked what was the matter.

"Oh, nothing. Sore throat and headache. Cold, I suppose; I wore low shoes in the rain yesterday."

Barbara turned quickly that the other should not see the effect of her words, and on her way to the door stopped to tell Mrs. Peters that Mary Ann was feeling sick. But later she told her mother that she was sure Mary Ann was coming down with scarlet fever. And so it proved, for the next morning Barbara saw the quarantine placard on Mr. Peters's door. She hurried on to let Mrs. Gerald know of it, but stopped horror-stricken. The placard was on Mrs. Gerald's door also, and worse; for white flowers and streamers hung over the bell-button, an undertaker's wagon stood at the curb, and the man was carrying up the garden-walk a small white casket. Little Betty had slipped away.

During the weeks that followed, Mary Ann almost slipped away too. Very slowly she came back again, seriously handicapped for a long time by the after-effects of that dreadful disease, aggravated by the cold she had contracted.

Barbara was much cast down by Mary Ann's illness and Mrs. Gerald's sorrow. She tried several times to write to the latter, but finally had to ask her mother to speak for her in the note she was writing. Mrs. Morrison did this in such a way that the stricken mother felt a warmer affection for her former Sunday-school scholar than she had ever before believed possible.

About this time a command, rather than an invitation, for two of the older girls to visit her came from the aunt after whom Amy was named. Laura's refusal to leave home was positive, and at last the two others accepted their aunt's somewhat domineering hospitality. But in order to win their consent, Laura had had to reveal the doctor's injunctions against exertion, and thereupon had difficulty in convincing the alarmed Mrs. Morrison that Barbara could do all that was needed, and that it was best for both sisters to let the arrangement continue.

Several weeks of general depression passed as the epidemic of scarlet fever increased, and then of corresponding elation as it decreased, and the health board finally declared it stamped out, although it was not considered safe to reopen the schools until after frost.

Barbara hardly smiled until she heard that Mary Ann was out of danger, and during that period she assiduously dedicated herself to serving Laura and every one else, often with misplaced efforts at helpfulness from which the recipients would gladly have been delivered. Perhaps she was unconsciously hoping that thus she might obtain a more favorable hearing to her prayers that Mary Ann might not suffer through her misdeeds and that she herself might be forgiven. When, therefore, recovery was assured, the good news turned Barbara's anxiety into jubilation. She felt free to "fling dull care away" and have a good time.

To the secret satisfaction of her family her efforts at service relaxed, but unfortunately the reaction carried her too far. Seeing that her friends not only

failed to stand at attention with admiration but actually appeared oblivious that she had been living for some few weeks as they had lived for many years, she felt herself aggrieved and released from further obligations. Why they were not also, she would have been puzzled to explain. But no occasion for explanation brought her face to face with her inconsistency.

After all, though, Barbara was no more at fault than those who excuse themselves by saying, "Oh, but I *never* do this or that!" "I never serve on committees!" "I never call outside of my own circle!"—as if this were sufficient and satisfactory reason for shifting to the shoulders of others the obligations to neighborliness, co-operation, and all their share of the kindly activities that make of this world a livable place. The only proper retort to such as these is:

"If you have been shirkers hitherto, all the more cause for you now to fall to work with might and main."

Perhaps if something of that sort had been said to Barbara at the beginning of her declension, she might not have had to learn it so painfully later.

Laura, with an invalid's sensitiveness, noticed that attentions were no longer spontaneous, and then that her requests were more and more reluctantly complied with; and soon the ungraciousness became so marked that she deferred asking for a service until the need was imperative. Finally she seized a favorable opportunity to speak to her grudging "lady in waiting." But to her mild remonstrance Barbara indignantly insisted that the change had been in Laura herself, that she was growing increasingly exacting and self-indulgent, and the intimation was not spared



that her weakness was, if not actually assumed, at least largely imaginary. In vain Laura cited the doctor's reiterated orders. Barbara's only reply was:

"Of course he accepts your statements. If he lived right here and saw you every day as I do, he would know well enough that you are just as able as I am to go up and down stairs and to do anything else that you really want to do."

She only half believed this, but having once asserted it, she would not retract, and the conversation ended in mutual discomfort and alienation. Laura found herself oppressed and agitated by the fear that she might be obliged to reveal to her already over-harassed mother the doctor's warning that what was now not more than weakness might develop into serious heart trouble unless his directions were minutely observed. The consequence was that as Barbara's disposition became worse, Laura's health also became worse, until one day brought the crisis for both of them.

## CHAPTER XVI

### BARBARA BETRAYS HER TRUST AND IS NOT SPARED THE ROD

L AURA and Barbara were entirely alone in the house. It was a close, hot afternoon, and Laura, faint and almost gasping on her couch, was trying to forget her discomforts by at least pretending to read, when Barbara looked in and said casually:

“I’m going to Grace Alden’s for a while.”

“But, Babs,” remonstrated Laura in an almost terrified voice, “there is not a soul in the house! Suppose the door-bell should ring?”

“Oh, well, let it ring. But no one is likely to call before Mary gets back from her errands.”

“But, truly, Babs, I do feel worse than usual; can’t you wait a little while till Mary does come in?”

“There! Isn’t it exactly as I said? You grow more and more imaginative and selfish. You don’t seem to care a mite that I have been slaving and slaving for you all these weeks; and now just because I want a little fun and relaxation, you’re not willing I should stir out. Amy and Susie are having no end of fun, you have nothing to do but to amuse yourself and lounge around from morning to night, but I must keep on the jump every moment because big sister thinks she is an interesting invalid!”

Laura raised herself as she answered:

"Barbara, you are perfectly aware that what you say is not true. I am getting anything but amusement out of this; and as for 'slaving,' you have not done a single errand for me this whole day——"

Here she faltered, and Barbara seized her chance.

"Well, I should say it was time I had one day off from running errands. What do you suppose I am made of if you suppose I can be on tap every single minute of every single day?"

"You are nothing of the sort!"

Now Laura knew that all this discussion was worse than useless, but she was near the breaking point, and could no more control herself than she could control her sister; so she went on:

"You were away all day yesterday, and have been out with your friends every day this week. Even now I am only asking you to wait a half-hour at the most, so that I shall not be entirely alone in the house. That is little enough to ask of you."

"'Little enough,' indeed! You mean you are only asking me to give up something I want most awfully much to do just to satisfy a selfish whim of your own."

The blood surged to Laura's head, and she pressed her hand on her palpitating heart, as she held the other out in a trembling, pleading gesture.

"Babs, please, *please* don't go! Oh, if you knew how these turns frighten me!" And her voice shook with restrained tears.

"That is sheer babyishness! And it is time you were cured of it!" and Barbara turned toward the door.

"Babs, I should suppose all those music lessons I



have given you and the pains I have taken with your practicing would entitle me to some consideration when I beg for what seems so important to me."

Barbara came into the room and close to the couch.

"You gave those lessons because father wanted you to, and he is under obligations if any one is; certainly I'm not. But after father let you have such expensive lessons, I should never suppose you would throw into his face that he is under obligations to you for your lessons to me."

"Barbara Morrison, you are intolerable!"

"Not nearly as intolerable as you were when you slapped me!"

Laura braced herself, though she grew very white.

"If you go," said she, "I shall do something much worse than slapping. I shall have a talk with mother. I simply cannot go on putting up with your unwilling, irritable ways. I am too sick to bear with them longer, much as I hate to worry her."

"Well, *I* can have a talk with mother as well as you, and I think it's full time I had it, whether you do or not!" and she whirled defiantly away. In doing so, her thin white skirt flew out and twisted around the leg of a light stand near the couch. She gave an impatient jerk, and over went the stand, carrying to destruction a vase containing a single exquisite rose. The vase was one of rare beauty and great value, brought from Europe by one of Laura's friends, and was her most cherished treasure. She sprang forward to save it, but too late, and as it crashed into fragments on the floor, she sank back upon the couch.

"Of all the ridiculous things!" cried Barbara, as she stood with her back toward her sister regarding

the wreckage. "To put that vase on that rickety stand! Just see how your stupidity has resulted!" But Laura made no reply. "The water has splashed all over me, and gone through and through. I can't possibly wear this soaked dress on the streets!"

Still no answer. Barbara continued her monologue.

"I don't consider it one bit my fault, and I shan't pick up a single scrap! If you haven't more sense than to put the vase in such a place, you deserve to have it broken." Still silence. "I know," and she whirled about to face her sister, "you don't answer because you are going to tell mother it was my fault; but—" and then she paused, for Laura lay with closed eyes, very white and still. "Well, if you don't want to speak, you needn't!"

Then, as she turned to leave, something about the inertness of Laura's position startled her, and she went back.

"Laura, why don't you speak? Mercy, you can't have fainted over such a trifle!" But her tone of annoyance changed to one of alarm as her sister's face seemed to grow grayer. "Laura, Laura, you frighten me!"

She ran for the smelling-salts, but these had no effect; neither did cold water on the even colder brow, nor yet the rubbing of the limp hands, nor anything else Barbara could think of to do. At last, thoroughly alarmed, she ran to the telephone and called the doctor:

"Laura's in a faint and I can't bring her to!"

He shouted back some hasty directions and that he was coming at once. In growing terror she did as he ordered, until she heard his welcome slam of the

front door and rush up the stairway; and then almost in a nervous collapse, she cried hysterically:

"Oh, doctor, doctor, do you think she's dead?"

Without answering, he began swiftly to work over the unconscious girl, and again Barbara wailed her question.

"Silence!" commanded he sternly. "Get me a pitcher of boiling water"; and then came order after order with the curt injunction to "get a move on" when there was the slightest appearance of bewildered hesitation. Now indeed Barbara was on the "jump every single moment," and the most constant and rapid jumping she had ever executed, and even so had complaints flung at her by the anxious man for her maladroitness. At last the white lids fluttered over the eyes that seemed to have sunken away back into Laura's head.

"Oh, Laura," began Barbara.

"Stop that," exclaimed the doctor in a fierce whisper. "Haven't you a grain of sense? Leave the room, or I'll have it all to do over again."

Barbara slunk away, completely cowed, though still wild with a desperate fear as to what this portended. Again the eyelids fluttered and then slowly began to open as a little color crept to Laura's pallid cheek, and she weakly murmured:

"Babs, please don't scold any more."

"There, there, my lady, we're coming around as slick as a whistle!"

The doctor's voice was so genial and encouraging that it seemed impossible that it was the same that had railed at Barbara for some twenty minutes past. Laura's eyes flew open.



"You here? What's the matter?"

And she would have sat up, but he prevented, saying soothingly:

"There, there, not a motion, my lady. Still as a mouse, that's the ticket. What's the matter? Oh, nothing so much; a little faint turn." And then with a humorous glance from under his bushy eyebrows at the bestrewn floor: "You've evidently been up to some high jinks that were too much for you."

"Oh," said Laura. "Now I remember it was the crash. I felt as if I had had a blow." And then she shivered and glanced around apprehensively.

"Barbara's in the other room," he said significantly. "She's all right. Don't you worry one leastest mite. Stick out your tongue for this powder, and now shut your eyes and let it put in its work."

"Doctor, you're a dear," whispered his patient with an affectionate smile.

"Tut, tut, not another word," said he, though mightily pleased. "Flirting with an old fellow like me! What d'you suppose Mrs. Hudson will say to such goings on?"

But Laura only smiled as the tense lines relaxed, and at last her gentle breathing proclaimed her asleep. The doctor watched her for a while, and then with a murmured "Close call, that!" turned to see Barbara in the doorway, staring in frightened silence. He sternly waved her back, and, first reassuring himself of his patient's well-being, he strode out to where Barbara stood white and shaking, huddled up against the wall.

"Is she dead?" she hoarsely asked.

"Now, don't be any more silly than you can help,

seeing it's you," growled the testy old gentleman with a scowl. "Of course she isn't dead, but a lot of mischief has been done somehow. But that's neither here nor there now. I'll be back in a half-hour or so."

He then proceeded to give her minute directions as to what to do, and where to call him should there be a change for the worse. Meanwhile she was to simply keep perfectly quiet and watch; and on no account, and he made her repeat this after him several times, to ask Laura questions or talk to her, or in any way to agitate her by opposition or showing anxiety or otherwise.

"I wish your mother were home, or Susie, or Amy. They have sense, and that, Barbara, is something that you seem to specially lack," and he looked her over discontentedly. "Well, I suppose I've got to trust you this time, though I do most inordinately hate to."

Then he left as abruptly as he had come. Barbara seated herself by the couch. Not a grain of self-assertion or self-confidence was left in her. Her white muslin hung about her in moist, bedraggled folds, and she felt as forlorn as it looked. She knew that this time she had failed with a terribly serious failure, and through the same faults that had caused other failures—an overweening self-importance, and resentment because the supply of praise fell short of her demand. Then she studied Laura, and was startled to see how fragile and how sad she looked, and recalled her remark that there "was no amusement in the situation" for her; and for the first time Barbara gave due credit to her uncomplaining, patient spirit.

During two months Laura had been obliged to deny herself at every point, and yet had maintained most of the time a smiling serenity. Moreover, she had perseveringly kept on giving Barbara lessons at unguessed cost to her own exquisite musical taste, and this was the first day that her balance and self-control had given way, and, as Barbara could now guess, with sufficient reason.

The girl's eyes, wet with self-reproach, were fastened tenderly in understanding sympathy upon Laura when the doctor entered again, and, after gazing at the sleeper, softly left the room, beckoning Barbara to follow him. Once out of hearing, he demanded sternly:

"Did you know that Laura's heart is dangerously weak?"

"No; oh, no; she never told us anything except that you had said she had used up her capital of strength and needed complete idleness."

"So much the better then for you," and the cloud of displeasure lifted somewhat. "Now what had you been doing to bring this about? Scolding and getting her excited and then smashing things?"

Barbara humbly acknowledged all, without trying to exculpate herself, except from intentional smashing, while he studied her face, then spoke abruptly:

"There is no organic disease, but a few turns such as this might work irremediable harm; and it looks as if you couldn't be trusted with so ticklish a business. There is no reason under the canopy why she shouldn't be as well as ever, and her wonderful self-control and patience are my greatest assistants; but if you are going to butt in with scenes like these, all that she and I can do together will be undone."



Barbara cowered under his disapproving scrutiny as he grumbled on: "And yet your mother seems to have more than enough now with helping Lloyd; and the girls are away, and here are you a quitter and a mischief-maker when it would be as easy as rolling off a log for you to take hold of this right——"

"Doctor, won't you please let me try again?"

"But I can't *trust* you; there's the rub. You are capable enough. As for that, a child would be capable enough. It's no stunt at all. It's not capacity that is required, but faithfulness, and that quality you don't seem to have."

He was still scowling, and she plainly saw that his rating of her practical value was pretty close to zero.

"No, I meant to be faithful, but I wasn't; but if you would only let me try again—just once more—and you could watch me, you know, and if I began to fail you could scold; oh, you could scold fit to take my head off!"

"I'd take your head off without waiting to scold, miss. Now, see here, Barbara, I've known you from the first second of your life, and I've been mightily disappointed in you. You haven't panned out well, and for no reason whatever that I know of except that you are selfish from top to toe."

"I know; and, oh, I did honestly intend to be better, and to truly do service!"

As her voice grew humbler and fainter and her eyes more pleading, his voice grew gruffer and his shrewd eyes pierced her through and through.

"Intend! Intend! Everybody, even scalawags, *intend* to do better. 'Service'! Oh, landie! what

were you intending to 'do service' for, miss? Your own glorification, I bet, and to make people feel indebted to you. Now, see here, I'm not asking for service. Landie but I get sick of that word! As if *doing* wasn't a sight more profitable for the doer than for the one done to. All I want of you is to exercise what capability you have so as to bring in big returns to yourself—to *yourself*. Do you absorb that idea?"

"Yes, I do, and I don't see why if I am so selfish you want me to be more selfish still."

"Missed again! It won't make you any more selfish (no business of mine if it does), but won't it make your selfishness of some use to you? Now, it only incapacitates you for everything, even for being happy. Since you are selfish, a great strapping healthy girl like you might as well use her selfishness scientifically, see?"

No, she did not see at all, only that the doctor was a most grumpy and cantankerous man, and that she was floundering quite beyond her depths. She also saw that he was not in the least impressed by her repentance, or by anything about her except as it related to Laura, and she looked up in stupefied silence.

"No, it's plain you don't see. Well, then, take it this way. I'm bound Laura shall get well, and be stronger and better than ever before in her life. She is made of first-class stuff, bodily, mentally, and spiritually. She has no end of poise and tenacity of character, and she has taken this wonderfully, and, what is finer, she has taken it scientifically. She has studied just how much she can do, and knows to a

dot where she must stop. And she hasn't made believe that she was a martyr either; now, has she?"

"No, she has been just as if nothing unusual were the matter."

"I knew it! I was sure of it! Trust her for that! With all her sensitiveness of temperament, she has known how to take this scientifically, and that has made her study of her symptoms altogether impersonal, so that it hasn't harmed her a mite. Now, if you could copy her and go in, as I am doing, with the determination to get her cured as a scientific proposition, without any question of 'doing service' and such like sentimental trash, but just that you, Barbara Morrison, schoolgirl, are going to have a hand in re-establishing the health of one of the dandiest girls in Borderville, you'll make a go of it. But this is where the 'doing service' rôle won't work; not with you in it, anyway."

"Then it won't be filling a chink?"

"Sure as you're alive it will."

"Then let me try. Oh, let me try."

"Blest if I know what to do about it. I'll let you know later."

With his accustomed abruptness he started downstairs, and encountered a very anxious mother entering the front door, for Mrs. Morrison had recognized the car before her house.

"Doctor, what is the matter?"

He drew her into the library, and there they were closeted for some time, and then he paid another hasty visit to Laura, who simply laughed in his face when he shook his big finger at her and threatened the direst punishment if she ever again indulged in any



such tomfoolery. Mrs. Morrison stood beside Laura's couch during the interview and laughed too; for Laura had told him that he was the dearest and cross-est old dear that ever lived, whether he spelled dear with a capital D or a capital B.

After the doctor left, Mrs. Morrison stooped and kissed her daughter tenderly, and said:

"I am so relieved that Doctor Hudson considers you such a young hopeful."

"Now just what does that mean, mother?"

"Why, that you are so sure to be stronger than ever, and that you are such 'a brick'—his own words—at taking care of yourself. Barbara, clear up this mess on the floor, and then change your dress. I hope that the doctor will never again find you and the room in such disgraceful disorder."

That was all the reproof she received, but the significance of tone and glance made it altogether sufficient.

## CHAPTER XVII

### A NEW VIEW-POINT

THE next day Doctor Hudson met Barbara with a twinkle in his eye as he asked:

"Been collecting halos again by doing service?"

She shook her head meekly.

"Tired of playing the saint, eh? Well, it doesn't exactly fit in with the sort of stuff you're made of."

Barbara flushed, but she felt no anger, partly because she knew it would be useless, but more still because there was fun without malice in his smile. He pinched her flushed cheek.

"Twitting on facts, eh? Well, then, let's get at business. If the saintly career is closed, how about the scientific? Ah, I see, that takes the cake. Now, then, we'll get down to bed-rock."

And he began to give her clearly and fully precise instructions, every once in a while turning to Laura with the injunction to remind her sister if there were any lapses.

"Keep her well up to the mark. No slouchy work this time. Now go out of the room, miss, and write that all out, and then bring it in and read it to me. Mark my word, and mark it well, there is to be no trusting to memory, nor to impulse, nor to inclination, nor to anything else but doctor's orders. Do you get that?"

Barbara assured him she did.

"This is downright, upright business now, and nothing but business. The kind of business you come up against when you go into a hospital to study nursing. There, if you're not on your job, you get fired to the tune of a minute-gun. See?"

Barbara saw as clearly as he could wish and carefully wrote out the directions, and almost with trembling awaited his verdict after reading them to him.

"Humph! Well, I suppose I can't expect perfection the first time! Laura, you go over those and correct them. Then she is to make two copies: one in this," producing a small pass-book, "for you; only one direction to every two pages; and in these ruled spaces, under date and hour, you're to mark full dash, half or quarter dash, or naught according to the way she obeys orders. Oh, no"—this in response to Barbara's crestfallen dismay—"I don't trust you alone yet, not by a jugful, with this precious little lady here; not unless she keeps tabs on you—honest tabs, mind you, my lady!" And again the big finger was shaken at Laura. She caught it and held it fast, while she shook hers at him with the question:

"What did you see in the looking-glass this morning?"

"Blest if I know, except an ugly old phiz."

"Was it spelled with a D or a B?"

"I'll ask Mrs. Hudson, if I don't find the answer before I've finished my rounds, Lady Saucebox."

Barbara found herself still left with the care of Laura, only that the latter was very really in control. Even her mother deferred to her regarding Barbara's duties, and the performance of these was rigidly



watched and faithfully reported to Doctor Hudson. He called daily, sometimes twice a day, although he declared his patient gaining rapidly. In between his calls he sent young Sargeant to make inquiries. It is true these inquiries generally resolved themselves into a half-hour or so of violin-playing with Barbara as accompanist under Laura's supervision. Barbara's piano accuracy gave her a good foundation for this, but she had to be drilled into strictly subordinating her part and adapting it to the requirements of the violin. It was difficult to make her realize that she was not the leader in the duet, still less an independent player; and she was long in comprehending that the glory of an accompanist is to intelligently and enthusiastically take the secondary part and wholly conform it to the master part; reaching perfection only as she became attuned and obedient to every slightest intimation of her leader's will.

This double tutelage as nurse and accompanist began to tell upon her character in ways unsuspected by her but obvious to others. For the first time in her life Barbara was learning to adapt herself. From the doctor she received frequent lessons in the science of curing invalids by good nursing. He aroused her ambition to do a good piece of work at the same time that he inspired her with a wholesome dread of falling below his standards. Similar forces impelled her in playing with Sargeant, and thus before she knew it she was thinking only of her work and not at all of herself. Daily she grew sunnier, less moody and variable in temper. Life began to seem full of interest, and the more her work interested her the better she did it; until the rest of the family fell into the way of drop-

ping in to enjoy the duets or summoning "nurse" for small ailments.

Doctor Hudson twinkled more than ever but did not praise, holding that she was but doing what she ought to have been doing all along. And Barbara, well aware of this, was eager only for that sort of approval which showed itself by giving her fuller responsibility and more frequent lessons in hygiene, anatomy, and physiology. One day the doctor said:

"Well, nurse, we can't let my Lady Saucebox here steal all your color away. She is fast becoming like Jeshurun, who waxed fat and kicked, and it's time you got more fresh air. So bundle on a hat and I'll take you for a spin. Now, mind, no prinking; I haven't time for that folderol."

Barbara flew to obey, and he turned to Laura:

"She's coming on all right, eh?"

"Doctor," cried she, "you're one big blessed angel. You are making her, as well as me, all over new."

"Hum, let's see, where does the doctor's young gentleman assistant come in? His wings sprouting a little too, eh?"

Laura tried not to blush, made a failure of it, and then took refuge in laughter and arch admonition.

"Now, you are in mischief, I verily believe. You go home to your wife, sir, and tell her that you are breaking loose, and she must look after you better or there'll be scandalous doings."

Barbara's ride with the doctor was one of many. Sometimes he was wrapt in revery, at other times talkative even to garrulousness. He put her through a course of humorously scientific lectures which she enjoyed hugely, though quite unaware of their great

value. He taught her to run his car, how to take off, mend, and replace punctured tires, and initiated her into the various maladies that running gears are subject to. He rarely complimented her for any success, but showed his approval by letting her do again what she had once done well. Once or twice, however, when she took a difficult curve well or neatly extricated herself from congested traffic, he said a hearty "Good girl!" which made her almost hilariously happy for days.

"Now," said he one day, "I'm going to give you the chance of your life. If you fail here, you're a goner sure. I've been working up to it, for it means a lot to me, and more still to a girl your own age in years, and as old as your mother in fine character development. She has a nasty spine, and I've got to where I need help in treating it. She can't afford to pay a nurse to come with me, and I can't either. So I'm going to see if you'll do."

He looked keenly at her as he continued:

"What I'm going to do will hurt her at first like the devil, and, if you flinch, that ends it. There, now, don't run me into the ditch for what I said!"

Barbara had started and given a twist to the steering-wheel which it took quick action to remedy. She was then somewhat pale and breathless, but set her lips firmly.

"No, no, not to-day! It won't do! Too cowardly! Turn around, and I'll drop you out at the next corner for home!"

"Doctor, please," she begged, but he was crossly obdurate, and did just as he said, thus giving her a full three miles' walk, during which she did much



praying for strength and much salutary self-mockery for chicken-heartedness. That evening she abruptly stopped playing to ask Sargeant if he knew of the case. Yes, he did, had been several times to help the doctor, but a woman would do better as helper. It was pretty tough on a poor little girl to have two men hurting her, and not a woman to even hold her hand.

"Why, where is her mother?"

Then the sad tale came out of a widow who had had to resume her previous employment as stenographer to support herself and little girl, while the latter, despite her painful ailment, aided by taking shorthand dictation at home for her mother to type-write off evenings.

"Is she such a little girl? I thought she was about my age."

"Well, aren't you a little girl? But she looks more so than you do because she is undersized."

Barbara went on with the accompaniment, only to soon stop again to ask:

"Does she suffer all the time?"

"Pretty much all the time, I fancy, though not always severely."

This sort of stop-and-begin-again duet continued until Laura ended it by declaring Barbara must either finish talking or finish playing.

"Just one more question. Would it really be a help to her to have me there?"

The future medical missionary became again "the young man who smiled" as he looked her over.

"Not if you develop too many nerves yourself, and positively not if your fastidiousness gets the upper hand as it did in helping Mrs. Martin."

"I imagine that even at the very worst her having me would be an improvement on having you."

"Barbara! Barbara!" cried Laura, shocked at her pertness, and then trying to turn it off as a jest: "It passes me why you two so often get into these wrangles."

"I suppose," explained Barbara, quite with indifference, "it is because we dislike each other so much."

He laughed good-humoredly. "Not on my part."

"Well, on mine, then," and she crashed out some chords so as to prevent reply.

But after she had left the room, Laura said apologetically:

"I can't think why Barbara treats you so rudely. It is a real source of mortification to me."

"No, no," answered he; "as long as she does not prejudice *you* against me, let her work off her dislike in her own way."

"But why should she dislike you? I have never seen you otherwise than very kind and forbearing toward her."

He sat thoughtfully a moment, and then said lightly:

"Believe me, it is of no account whatever, but if it worries you, why don't you ask her?"

"I have, and she told me shortly that it was not my affair, and that as long as mother understood, it was enough," and Laura smiled wryly at her unsuccess. "Babs tells mother her very innermost thoughts," she explained.

Immediately his brow cleared; he had been wondering if he ought to tell of his previous meetings with Barbara. "For," he said to himself, "if she talks as

freely on the trains to other strangers as she did to me, she ought to be looked after!" But now he said to Laura:

"Oh, that makes it all right. It can't be anything very serious, for your mother has not turned against me. I suppose I treat Miss Barbara too much as if she were a little girl. The truth is, she seems like one to me, but she is just at the age when she takes herself very seriously and wants to be treated like a young lady. She'll get over that with time. I know all about it—been there myself. Indeed, I think boys more than girls are subject to tormenting self-consciousness as they get into their teens. But your mother is such a wonderfully discriminating, wise person that she will know how to give the right touches. Besides," and he gave a nod of smiling emphasis, "that big-little sister of yours has a lot of sturdy qualities to build upon. She has enough energy and impetuosity and will-power——"

"Obstinacy," interjected Laura.

"Well, call it what you please, but anyway she has enough of the up-and-coming qualities to furnish out a dozen boys, and if she doesn't make something very much worth while out of herself, I lose my bet."

Laura beamed upon him.

"She has been a perfect dear to me. I don't know what I should have done without her, and I am very grateful to you for judging her so kindly."

Any young man, even a medical missionary, would have been glad to receive the glance bestowed upon him by Laura's soft brown eyes, and Bob Sargeant was not one to be unmindful of his blessings.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### DOCTOR HUDSON'S NEW ASSISTANT

BARBARA had ceased to care about Laura's book of marks (though it showed an increasingly higher rating of her nursing efficiency), for she was becoming as interested as the doctor himself in her sister's complete cure and in herself having a hand in it. Consequently, Laura gained so rapidly that Barbara had ample leisure to pursue what Mark called her "medical course." She kept hoping to see "the girl with a spine," but from the day he dropped her out of his car three miles from home for what he considered her cowardice, Doctor Hudson was obstinately mum on that subject.

However, he made occasion to have her at his office to answer the bell and the telephone and to help him when there was a hurt to be dressed. He began with the simpler services, such as handing him the absorbent cotton for swabbing out a lanced boil, or holding the water-bag for irrigating a wound, or waiting on him as he cauterized incipient gangrene. In this way she saw some of the very women and children to whom she had planned to extend missionary efforts in their shanties by the creek bear pain so unflinchingly that for very shame she could not flinch herself, although more than once a deadly sickness came over her.

Then Doctor Hudson would change her occupation without apparently perceiving her condition.

Gradually she acquired three very important and useful qualifications—a quiet self-control, alertness in doing the correct thing, and respecting sympathy for all sufferers whatever their station or breeding. Moreover, her growing interest in the work soon made her oblivious of dirt, squalor, and smells.

Meanwhile Laura had been allowed to resume most of her usual pursuits, although piano-practising was still taboo.

“Moderation is more difficult than total abstinence,” pronounced Doctor Hudson, “and notwithstanding the power of self-control you have shown, I don’t want you too severely tested yet a while. Beginning to practise might prove your undoing, on the same principle as a dram to a reformed inebriate. No, you needn’t turn up your pretty nose at me; I can tell you, my lady, I’m not taking any chances, not even improbable ones, upon a relapse. You’re going straight to the country, now that Sue and Amy are on their homeward way and can be with you; and you are going to board with some old-fashioned friends of mine, glad to get a little extra money, and who haven’t a piano within a mile of them. See? I let you manage your own case too much at first, worse luck! But I’m on it to the finish now, and I’m sitting t-i-g-h-t!” he spelled emphatically.

As much as Laura might laugh and jest with the doctor, she none the less yielded implicit obedience; and uncomplainingly went off to the pianoless family without even once touching her own keys.

After her leaving, Barbara slid backward somewhat

into envious faultfinding because every one but herself was having a vacation and lots of fun. But Mark promptly nipped this in the bud.

"Everybody having vacations, indeed! Well, I should say it was about time Laura had a holiday from being sick. And what do you think of mother attending to all of the housekeeping and goodness knows what else, besides working in the office all summer? And what do you think of the sort of vacation father has been having, not even a half-holiday off? Only natural modesty prevents me pointing out myself also as one of those with nose steadily applied to the grindstone while my youngest sister has been flying around town and country in a fine auto, the envied of all beholders."

"I *envied*?" The idea was incredible to Barbara.

"Yes, you *envied*. Our stenographer said to me once: 'Isn't that your sister in with Doctor Hudson? What a perfectly lovely time she does have. I see her riding nearly every day, and I sometimes feel as if I'd give up my chance of ever again owning a new hat if I could have just one ride.' And old Sam said: 'My but Miss Babs does have a gallumpshus time this summer! If I could be a pretty young white lady instead of only old nigger trash, perhaps I could be spinning along, too, as happy as a archangle!'"

Barbara laughed, but immediately became serious and thoughtful. Both her father and mother had been watching her, and now the former asked:

"Truly, daughter, has your summer been so very strenuous and disagreeable?"

Barbara turned a brightly smiling face toward him.

"No, father, I think it has been the pleasantest



summer I ever spent in my life. And as for being strenuous, I doubt if I ever before did so much visiting and general junketing about, and all of the most agreeable sort."

"I am so glad, dear," said her mother. "I really was afraid that the doctor was working you too hard, and that you were having a rather tedious, dull time."

"Mother, I've had the time of my life; but I doubt if I would have discovered it but for Mark. Mark, I'm going to ask the doctor if I may take your stenographer for a little spin some time while he is in at old Mrs. Brown's; he always has to stay there so long; and you must let her go whenever I make the chance."

This was accomplished successfully, and even old Sam was made "as happy as a archangle" one day by being picked up by the doctor as he was shuffling along the dusty highway. At times it occurred to Barbara with a sense of surprise that there was a new freedom in discussing family affairs before her, even to the extent of asking her views; but her mind was too occupied for her to be elated thereby, as she would have been formerly.

For the same reason she did not greatly miss her sisters; besides that, the companionship of Grace Alden partly compensated for their absence. Grace accompanied Barbara in the visits required by Doctor Hudson to sick children; and also made dainties, or furnished toys and amusements for the little patients.

Very often in their visits they encountered Bob Sargeant, and oftener still heard of him. Everywhere he had won respect, but not always by any means cordial liking. "He do be too free-spoken" was the complaint of one old hag whom he had berated for

the filthiness of her abode and other evil conditions more serious still. She was grumbling as she cleaned up that it wasn't fitting for a slip of a young chap to threaten her, old enough to be his grandmother, with the health officer. And he'd had no call to tell her he smelled whiskey on her breath when 'twas only a raw onion she'd been eating for the healthfulness of it.

Barbara was trying to change the dressing on the burnt hand of her little grandson, when the pain drew forth oaths doubly shocking from childish lips.

"Shut up!" yelled the old crone, giving him a whack with her broom. "Shame on ye swearing before a young lady!"

The blow nearly knocked the boy over, and wrenched his hand away from Barbara's so roughly that he howled and danced with the hurt of it, and swore worse than ever.

"You wicked, wicked woman!" almost shrieked the amateur nurse; and then, to Grace's unmitigated surprise, she caught the filthy little fellow in her arms and began to soothe him with loving words and caresses, just as if he were some dainty nursery darling. His grandmother, more incensed than ever, let out curses worse than those for which she had corrected the boy, until Grace quieted her down with calm but forcible words.

The boy meanwhile, as still as a mouse, gazed wide-eyed on the girl who had given him his first experience of a petting, and allowed her to do what she would without a whimper; and then tagged after the two until they had to get a neighbor's child to take him almost forcibly home.

An excited account of this adventure was given at

the Morrisons' table, with the result that Mr. Morrison told Doctor Hudson to "cut out the slumming," and the boy, thus deprived of Barbara's attentions, was sent to the hospital. When she visited him there, she hardly recognized the clean and pretty little fellow who greeted her entrance with a joyous whoop and clung to her skirts while he held his face up for a kiss.

"Are you a good boy now?" she asked.

He hung his head and pointed to the nurse.

"He's getting good," she answered, "though I have had to wash his mouth out pretty hard with soap three times to-day to get the taste of the bad words out. Yes, sir, three times, and if it happens again, something stronger than soap will have to be used." She looked so serious that he shook his head emphatically as he promised:

"No more bad words; no, no, *no!*"

"Now say this and do just what I do." And Barbara stood him very straight before her and recited, while he followed word by word and gesture by gesture:

"If somebody asks me to curse and swear,  
Let him laugh at me, what do I care?  
I'll tell him *no!*"

ending with a very big "No" and a stamp of the foot.

This quickly brought together all the children who were able to be running about, and Barbara had to go over it many times while with great glee they recited in chorus, even those in the cots joining in. Fortunately, there were no very sick children for whom quiet was necessary.



This call was followed by more, in which Grace and some of the other girls shared; and Barbara was abashed to learn how many of her schoolmates had been in the habit of frequently visiting the children's ward to amuse the inmates and supply them with pictures, toys, fruit, and delicacies.

"Why did you never tell me?" she asked.

They glanced at each other in embarrassment until one of them spoke up, "Why, it never entered our heads to tell you anything we did," and the ingenuous surprise of her tone revealed to Barbara as no words could have done what a great gulf she had created between herself and them.

A few days later she learned that the wretched old grandmother, having drunk up her last cent, had been removed by the town authorities to the poorhouse. So thither Barbara took her way, not exactly knowing why she went, nor just what she was to do when she arrived. At the last moment she had bethought her that reading a chapter in the Bible might be a proper proceeding. But however proper this might have been, it was most improperly received, and Barbara was actually fleeing before the imprecations and more solid missiles that were hurled at her when she was checked by the poorhouse keeper, who strode into the room saying threateningly:

"Bread and water for you to-day, my woman, and worse if you don't hold your tongue. Mind you, sharp now."

The old thing began to whine that she'd had bread and water all that week already, and was that trembly she couldn't lift her head.

"Well, you seem to be able to lift your hands fast

enough," and he grinned at Barbara. "Better keep clear of her, miss; such as you can't do anything for such as her; she's too low. Young things like you'd best be after the kids to keep them straight before they get that far down."

"But won't you please let her have something besides bread and water? I should feel awfully if by coming to see her, I got her into trouble."

"Now mind the lady, that's a dear fellow, and I'll be like all the angels in heaven for doin' nothin' but singing hymns and Slams. And let her stay a bit and talk with me; I'm sure she'll make me a better woman."

Barbara's heart thrilled at this swift "taming of the shrew," and her eyes pleaded for consent. The man's face twitched with a desire to laugh at her gullibility, but he consented readily enough and left them.

"Now come here, dear young lady, pretty young lady," wheedled the old woman. "I didn't go in for to be like that; it was a kind of spasm what took me out of the bad, bad past, that I've given up. Oh, yes, I'm pious now, and it's the Bible for mine!"

There was something so fearsome about her distorted face and bleared eyes that Barbara almost regretted staying, and when she was besought in a pious whine for a "comforting reading," she sat at a distance until forced by assurances of "deefness" to come closer, and then shivered as the bony claws fingered her clothes, while their owner mumbled remarks on each article.

"I can't read if you go on like that."

"Well, let it alone for to-day, dearie." Then peer-

ing all around to make sure that none was within sight or hearing, she put her wizened lips close to Barbara's ears and whispered:

"Dearie, just bring me a little drop of whiskey, won't you? I'm pining away for the need of it. Now, dearie, 'tain't for bad drinkin' I want it. Drink? Why I wouldn't lose my immortal soul for drink! It's just for a tonic, don't you see, dearie?" She laid a claw coaxingly on Barbara's hair, but the girl drew back in disgust, only to feel her hair clutched and a voice no longer pious growling out hideous threats if she did not do as bid, and the other claw clapped over her mouth stifled Barbara's attempted cry for help.

Suddenly the keeper stood in the doorway and she was released.

"I was only lovin' the pretty little lady," whined her tormentor.

"Well, I guess the young lady's had enough lovin' from you for one day, eh, miss?" as Barbara rushed toward him. "Reely scart now! My, that's too bad; wish I'd come sooner, but it all seemed so quiet. Oh, I hadn't left you stark alone with the likes of her; I was here by the door-jamb all the time."

He had got her out into the open air by this time and brought her a dipper of water. Then as her color returned, he could not forbear saying:

"You thought you had converted her mighty quick, didn't you, miss? Now, don't you make any such mistake; she's a nut that it would take a sledge-hammer to crack; but there's a nice little old bedrid woman in that there room that'd be mighty cheered to see you. Don't want to go in? Well, well, no



wonder; you have had a bad time, I know." But he looked disappointed, so Barbara impulsively consented.

"Say, mother," he called, "take this young lady to old Mrs. Used-ter-be, will you? She's got that name fastened on her from tellin' so often how she uster be this and that."

"Mother" proved to be almost as masculine-looking as himself; but by that time Barbara understood that strength was fully as necessary a qualification as any other for the office of poorhouse keeper.

Little Mrs. Uster-be was shrivelled up and bedridden from sheer old age, and while she had practically no mind left, and certainly no beauty, there was something winning as well as deeply pathetic in the joy with which she welcomed a call and the smiling content with which she listened to the reading.

Barbara walked home revolted and sick at heart as she pondered the two questions: Why had her life had such careful guarding and training? And why was there so much in it to minister to her comfort, when the former had apparently been entirely absent from the life of the one old woman and the latter from that of the other?

After hearing of this experience, Mrs. Morrison forbid further calls alone at the poorhouse and all communication with the old harridan who was whiskey-thirsty.

In talking it over with her school friends, Barbara again had the mortification of learning that here, too, those of them in Mrs. Gerald's class had been ahead of her at the poorhouse, and still went, in groups of threes, at regular intervals.

"Oh," said one of them, "of course you know we aren't attempting to do them good, only to make them happier. They do like sociability, and are just as tickled as anything over our bringing flowers and candies."

"Candies! when they are so old that they are standing on the very verge of the grave." Flowers were funereal enough to be orthodox, but really this other sort of self-indulgence in full view, as it were, of eternity scandalized Barbara not a little.

"Good gracious, Babs, what has that to do with eating candy? Why, I expect to eat it if I live to be a hundred!"

The girls passed on and left Barbara sitting on her porch steps waiting for the doctor to come along and pick her up. And as she waited she meditated on the disquieting fact that these very girls whom she had accused of religious insincerity had already been doing the work she had plumed herself upon having suggested. This explained the significant smiles passed between them when she had proposed organizing a chink-fillers' club. Barbara felt so very small that she would have welcomed the opportunity to have crawled away into a chink tiny enough to hide her from even her own observation; and her communings ran: "Well, Miss Barbara Morrison, how do you think you like yourself now that you have at last found yourself out? Oh, yes, you were going to do no end of good, were you? And all you actually did was to slander the girls who were doing the good. No, you can't squirm out of it; this firing-squad you have *got to face*."

It was eloquent of her changed view-point that her

indignation was wholly with herself, to the exclusion of any resentment against the girls for omitting her from their activities. Her comment on that was:

“Good for them! I richly deserved all I got.”



## CHAPTER XIX

### THE GIRL WITH A SPINE

BARBARA'S meditations were interrupted by the doctor's car, and she jumped in and took the wheel.

"All ready for my girl with the spine?"

She checked her speed so as to face him.

"Yes, I am; and, if you don't take me to-day, I'll drop you out and let you do the walking back this time."

He pretended to frown, and grumbled:

"That's the way; teach a girl to be a chauffeuress and a surgeoness and a Red Cross nurse, and she has an old fellow like me at her mercy! But, young woman, crow low until you have better luck in putting on tires."

As they went on, he explained what assistance he would need, and to her surprise it was much simpler than much he had already required of her. She looked her thought and he continued:

"I considered it best to put you pretty well through your paces before making another attempt. I wasn't going to take any chances of a breakdown or awkwardness with my brave little girl with the spine. Her name really is Patience Noble, but my name for her, 'The Brave Girl with a Spine,' suits better. There's the house."

It was very small and sadly in need of paint and

repairs. Just at the side of the door was a placard which read:

STENOGRAPHER  
DICTATION TAKEN HERE

The door was opened by a girl in a wheel-chair, which she managed with great dexterity.

Barbara's first impression was of a face all large, dark, appealing eyes, and pathetic mouth; and next of the sweetest of smiles in which eyes and lips joined and a bewitching dimple came and went, as two slender hands were impulsively stretched out to her in welcome.

"If you only knew how hungry I have been for you; but this dear, blessed doctor insisted that I could not have my new nurse until she had attained her degree. What do you think he said: 'She is not to touch you until I consider her fit to help me set the wing of an angel who has leaned too far over the battlement of heaven.' Would you ever suspect him of being a poet?"

"There, there, there, Lady Rattle-pate. Now you will spoil her by making her fancy that she has reached perfection."

"No, I've learned enough to know that I am very far from that," interrupted Babs.

Doctor Hudson turned his back that the two girls might not see how fond and proud he was of both, and only growled out something to the effect that it was lucky she'd learned that much if nothing more.

Barbara's heart sank within her as the treatment proceeded, and the electricity, the rubbing, and the

strapping up made Patience blanch, while moisture gathered on her forehead and around her lips. Still the "Brave Girl with a Spine" smiled, and still the dimple played hide-and-seek in her pale cheek. When the doctor at last tipped back the chair so that she was reclining, she beamed gratefully at Barbara, saying:

"If you could only know what a comfort it has been to have you helping. You are so quick and yet so deft!"

But the doctor laid a finger on her lips. Then he gave the young nurse minute directions for any emergencies while he made another call, and ordered perfect quiet for at least a half-hour.

"After that, if she wants to, you girls can have a little chat together."

Patience closed her eyes, and Barbara sat down where she could watch every change without being seen. Soon her gentle breathing told that Patience slept, and slowly the color climbed into her face again. The half-hour was barely up when her eyes flew open and she said:

"Oh, I feel so much better; isn't it time to talk?"

And then the chattering began.

After the recent indifference shown by her school-mates, the unconcealed avidity with which the sick girl seized upon her companionship roused in Barbara a responsive enthusiasm. Never before, excepting by Mrs. Barton, had she been so immediately and effectually captured. Soon they were addressing each other as Patty and Babs, and the one was pledged to give the other lessons in stenography and the other to repay by lessons in knitting and crocheting.

Patty explained that her patrons being mainly



school-teachers, or business men on their way to or from employment, occupied her early morning or late afternoon hours, and that the intervening time dragged because tired back and eyes equally interfered with continuous holding and reading of books.

"If I can learn to knit with my eyes shut, I can make a lot of things to sell."

Barbara advanced the supposition that Patty was frightfully lonely most of the time. But this was laughingly denied. She really had no chance for it. First and last, there were her patrons, nearly all of them interesting in themselves, and often with tremendously interesting matter for dictation, only they were always on a rush; then between whiles the neighbors' children ran in and out; and evenings her mother and she had the comfiest of comfy times together, while she read off the dictation for her mother to typewrite.

"And after that we have the most delectable gossips. Mother tells me what she has seen in the city, and she certainly sees the funniest things and tells about them in the most amusing way. No, I really don't have any chance to get lonely; but I confess that, until you came, I sometimes got wildly hungry for the companionship of a girl about my own age!"

Every few days after that, either brought by the doctor or walking the long road, Barbara made her way to Patty's, and the mutual instructions progressed apace.

One day Barbara declared to her mother:

"Patience is the most allegorical creature I ever knew, or knew of, except perhaps Bunyan himself."

This morning she looked white, and I asked her if she was in pain, and she said, as if it were a good joke, that she had been prancing all over the old dragon Pain on her good steed Fortitude, and that while they hadn't killed him dead, he had lost his chance to make them squeal. And the other day when she had been trying to knit in the dark, and had spoiled it all by dropping stitches, she said such a swarm of pesky little Discouragement Flies began to buzz around her that she had to get her swatters out, and Madam Stick-at-it had to come to her help with a fly-brush. I asked what her swatters were, and she said she was almost ashamed to tell me that they principally consisted of slang; that she had noticed how biggity-biggity small boys always seemed to feel when they got hold of a new slang word, and so she experimented and found it really most exhilarating. On this occasion she adopted little Micky Bradley's threat to his brother, 'I'm going to whop you to a frazzle!' and it worked like a charm on the Discouragement Flies; proved one of the best swatters she had ever tried. It makes me laugh to hear her droll notions."

"It makes me feel more like crying for the poor child," said Mrs. Morrison.

"You don't need to," answered Barbara meaningly, for she thought that at last she had found the answer to the riddle of Patty's glad contentment, which had greatly puzzled her. At first she had accounted for it as merely company manners assumed in her honor, but when, as they became intimate, it still continued consistent and unaltered, she had concluded that, Patty being Patty, after all life was not so very hard

on her. But when a few days later she broached this theory to Doctor Hudson in the flippant remark that Patience was built without nerves, either spiritual or physical, and really didn't feel what would pain more sensitive souls and bodies, he dryly remarked:

"Guess again!"

Then he began a tirade against selfish people, which made her wish she had kept silence.

"They are such blunderheads," he growled. "If a body moans with pain, they say"—and his voice went into a cracked falsetto—" 'Oh, bless my soul, what a shocking lack of self-control!' But if another smiles at pain, then the cry is: 'Oh, of course it's easy for her! She's not sensitive like me.' "

"I didn't say like me," denied Barbara indignantly.

"Well, you meant it, all the same. Like every other selfish person, you are always present to yourself, and down underneath are always comparing others with yourself. Your first conclusion was that as you couldn't have borne Patty's hardships, of course she wasn't bearing them, but was putting up a bluff for your benefit."

Barbara's face was very red as she demanded how he knew that.

"I knew it, my dear detractor, after that second visit, when you said with airy sweetness—oh, such sweetness—that Patty had perfectly lovely company manners. As Patty is as transparent as the sunlight, I knew that even you weren't blind enough not to find out eventually that company manners weren't in it with her. So I foresaw the next step in detraction was bound to be that she hadn't your exquisitely sus-



ceptible feelings of the princess who couldn't sleep because of the crumpled rose-petal in her bed. And, sure enough, here it comes along. Now, why can't you just own up that Patty is the best sport ever, and that you wish you were like her?"

The doctor's words stabbed Barbara deeper than words had ever stabbed her before, and it was with difficulty her trembling hand guided the steering-wheel as she stammered:

"I am not a detractor. There is nothing in the world I hate so! Oh, I know all about it. The meanest, sneakiest! I ought to! I can tell you I have suffered enough from detraction! No one seemed to care what they said against me, or how much they belittled my good qualities. Why, doctor, I couldn't possibly be a detractor after what I've gone through myself!"

Doctors meet with gross self-ignorance too often to be taken by surprise at almost any manifestation of it. So Doctor Hudson only whistled a few bars from "'Way down South in Dixie," and then said mildly:

"Well, have it your own way, honey. I only thought there was some detraction in that fracas when you almost killed Laura; and some of your remarks about several and divers of our fellow citizens have had the same flavor. But perhaps I'm mistaken. I don't want to be an old detractor myself, so I'll take it all back."

Silence followed, and Barbara, finding herself bereft of opponent, fell into reflections which ended in her saying in a small, timid voice:

"Anyway, I don't *want* to be a detractor."

Whereat a kindly pat on her shoulder gave her the courage to ask:

“What does make Patty so contented, then?”

“Ask herself,” was the reply.

## CHAPTER XX

### THY WILL BE DONE

AFTER the doctor had left the two girls together, Barbara did ask, and with simple frankness Patty answered:

“It is a stratagem father taught me, and mother keeps it up; a sort of outwitting trouble by a flank movement. Let me tell you about father, and you will understand.”

It was the tale of an ardent young man with indomitable will-power and wonderful prospects stricken in his career of spectacular success by an incurable disease. There was the giving up of business, followed by the dwindling away of his small capital; then the exchange of their pretty home for this humble dwelling; the selling of one valued article of furniture or ornament after another; and at last her mother's return to the employment she had had before her marriage.

During all this her father had maintained a helpful courage, and had trained her to discern “the advantage of disadvantages.”

“He taught me that even if I were poor and despised, still the Lord thought upon me, and that though handicapped as I was—without health, or wealth, or social position, or further education than a cripple could receive at home—opportunities to win honors were wide open to poor little insignificant me,



too, and that all the odds against me would be counted as assets. 'For God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not to bring to naught things that are; that no flesh should glory in His presence.' "

Barbara simply stared. Patience had led her quite out of her depths. All this loftiness of attitude struck her as fanciful and fanatical; but since Patience had quoted Scripture in support of it, she felt silenced. Casting about in these difficult circumstances for something to say, she lit upon a remark which struck her as not only strictly appropriate but eminently pious.

"So your father was resigned to God's will?"

What was her shock when Patty exclaimed indignantly, even scornfully:

" 'Resigned'! Not he! You don't understand at all if you think he could ever have sunk to that low estate!"

Now here was where Barbara herself could quote Scripture; and she did it with considerable solemnity and severity of rebuke in her tone.

"Why, Patty, Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer to say 'Thy will be done,' and He said it Himself in the Garden!"

"Yes, He said '*Thy* will, not *mine*, be done,' and that was just what father longed for. I don't believe that he wished for anything else with the passion he wished God's will might be done on earth as in heaven.

But that isn't being 'resigned.' Resignation is mere acquiescence. If you were starving, you wouldn't be *resigned* to having food. A gold-digger isn't *resigned* to finding a nugget. A shipwrecked sailor wouldn't call resignation the sensation he feels when he is rescued.

"Why, father *rejoiced* in the will of God, and was *glad*—it is true, I'm not exaggerating—to suffer anything if it was advancing the doing of God's will. He, too, said '*Thy will, not mine, be done.*' He used to say that he had never had a pain or sorrow that had not proved a key to unlock the door into some joy that he could never otherwise have entered upon. I always called him the joyous pilgrim, and he called me the princess. I will read you that story of his some day. I wrote it all out."

Then noticing Barbara's expression, she added quickly:

"I see you think he was something queer—a little off his head, perhaps."

Barbara blushed at this insight, and stammered that probably she didn't quite understand; and Patty laid her hand softly on Barbara's and said affectionately:

"No; of course in your happy, protected life you couldn't be expected to understand. Father used to say no one could without having had the experience of trouble, or else an almost divinely sympathetic imagination."

"Well, I've had trouble enough too. Not outside trouble, perhaps, like yours. But I think it is having pretty real trouble to be the least cared for in your own family, and of no account at all among one's schoolmates. People who have spectacular trouble

like yours are slow enough to appreciate the hidden heart troubles."

Patty shrank with pain at the implication that she was making a parade of her misfortunes; and pain, too, for Barbara, who had already unconsciously revealed that selfishness and jealousy were the source of her "heart troubles," but she answered cheerily:

"Of course you have your troubles, too, dear; but father used to say (and I have found that he was absolutely right) that every trouble that God sends us is a prize package with a wonderful gift inside; and that when we can't seem to get at the hidden joy, we must ask Him how to open the package. But the prizes are only in the troubles that God Himself sends us."

"But God sends us all our troubles."

"Oh, dear me, no. I've had a lot of troubles that God had nothing to do with. I simply manufactured them myself; and of course when I tried taking them to Him, I discovered what sham packages they were."

Barbara looked at her sharply, but detected only candor and sympathy. Just then the doctor's horn sounded the signal, and Patty threw her arms around her and said:

"You are such a solid comfort, Babs, and I am so glad you said what you did about hidden troubles, for I see now that I have laid far too much stress on the outward ones. Father used to say they only represent the taking of the outworks, but trouble inside the heart meant that the citadel had been invaded. I do hope that you will find the prizes in your packages."

This sounded so exceedingly mixed to Barbara that she kissed her hastily without trying to answer, but



fervently wishing that she had never been told the things that "father said." At her own gate stood a group of girls, who immediately surrounded her to discuss the coming Sunday-school picnic.

"But I'm not going," said Barbara. "I never went to but one of them, and I loathed it."

"You are going. You are going," insisted Mary Ann Peters. "Isn't she, girls?"

"Of course she is, and she knows it," assented Grace Alden.

Then all the others joined in until, greatly flattered, she consented. When Barbara ran up the piazza steps to where her mother sat with a book, but really too pleased to attend to its contents, she was greeted with:

"Babs, the girls had been waiting nearly half an hour for you. I am glad you promised to go. It is a real joy to me, dear, to see how popular you are becoming with the girls."

And perhaps the exhilarating effect of this experience upon Barbara accounted for the unusually good game of chess she played with her father that evening.

"Well," he said, "you proved yourself a foeman worthy of my steel. At this rate you will soon become a star player."

"She is fast becoming a star performer in all that she undertakes," said her mother with a meaning smile that brought the quick flush of pleasure to the girl's cheek.

"Hurrah for the family chink-filler!" shouted Mark. He had been an interested watcher of the closely fought game, and now, with his accustomed

rapidity, had gathered her up and waltzed her out into the hall and onto the piazza.

"Oh, Mark," she gasped, "please don't dance down the block as you did that other time. If you do it again, it will make the neighbors positive that we are crazy."

"Who cares if they are?" he answers as before, and whirled her down the steps as he spoke. Even this haste did not prevent her waving her handkerchief to the invalid old gentleman next door, who, smiling, returned her salute. They had been warm friends from the day she rescued his Angora cat, clinging to a telegraph-pole, from the dog barking below.

"Now," remonstrated Barbara, "just as sure as fate, if you go whisking me down the street you'll dance me into Doctor Sargeant again. He's always around when he isn't wanted."

"Don't excite yourself over Bob Sargeant. As long as Laura is at Elm Tree Hill, you won't see much of Sargeant around this end of town."

"*What!*" almost shrieked Barbara, standing stock-still. Mark only laughed.

"Haven't you noticed that he has seemed to have lost his interest in violin-practice lately, sis? And don't you know that the dear lad has to recuperate every week-end at Elm Tree Hill?"

"Mark, you're joking!"

"Blest if I knew I was! I thought I was as serious as I ever was in my life."

"How perfectly horrid!" And then anxiously: "But surely Laura can never care for that fellow?"

"Can't tell; girls are awfully queer. But what's

the objection to him? He seems a good sort, and perhaps he'll get over his medical missionary craze."

"Why—" But Barbara stopped short, looked vexed, and then blurted out: "I simply detest him; he always makes me feel as if I were a fool, and as if he knew it."

"Oh, come now," and he tucked her hand comfortably in his arm; "nobody is likely to think you a fool these days; you're proving yourself altogether too capable and useful. You've taken your talent for making people happy out of its napkin, and are working it to mighty good purpose."

This from Mark! She stared at him, too astonished to even feel pleasure; indeed, she half suspected that he was ridiculing her. Seeing this, he gave her hand a little squeeze, and continued seriously:

"I'm in dead earnest, sis; you haven't an idea how much you have altered during these past months. You have made as good a fight against your tempers as you did at chess to-night. I wish I could help you, but the truth is, Babs, I haven't got much of anywhere myself yet. You see, the girls have always made a sort of pet lambkin of me, and led me around with a pretty blue ribbon, and I seem never to have sensed the necessity of being helpful to others. You once accused me of being a bad stumbling-blockhead of a brother, and I guess you were about right. I wasn't on deck when you needed me, and now that I am, you don't need me. Seem to have missed my chance. But I thought that at least I could let you know that I have eyes in my head, and could see when improvement is as plain as the nose on your face."



"Oh, Mark, Mark, do you really and truly think so?"

And that was the beginning of a long cosey chat as they paced up and down in the gloaming.

That night Barbara remembered that she was to take her packages of troubles to God and ask Him to help her find the prizes in them. What then were her troubles? That the schoolgirls did not like her? But that very day her mother had called her "popular" with them. That she was unappreciated by her parents? That evening both father and mother had commended her with unlimited cordiality. That Mark was not even aware of her existence? Her heart glowed with the memory of his brotherly interest and encouragement. Neither could she complain of her sisters, for the day before a round-robin letter from all three had been in her mail. She was going to God with her bundles of troubles, and behold, she found herself empty-handed. Her efforts to reconstruct them ended in the self-abasing acknowledgment that they had been what Patty had described as not from God but of her own manufacture; and that she had allowed the forces of envy, detraction, and jealousy to occupy the citadel of her heart.

"Barbara Morrison!" she apostrophized herself, "you are an outright, downright fraud! Here are you with the dearest sport of a constantly suffering friend, the best father and mother that ever a girl had, and the finest brother and sisters and schoolmates, not to mention the blesseddest cross old dear of a doctor to teach you sense—and you have troubles, have you? If I could get hold of you and shake you, I'd soon make some real trouble for you. I don't care how

many of them you fake up; from this time on you're to quit your whining and fussing! Now, then, I've spoke my last word and thunk my last thunk about you and your troubles."

But it was not quite the last "thunk"; for there was first the childlike prayer that all her sinful foolishness might be blotted out, and a childlike promise to forget herself; and then she dropped peacefully to sleep, having cast off the tormenting load of self.

The Sunday-school picnic passed off in fun and frolic; but it had a result for Barbara more important than she suspected; for it aroused her half-awake love for children to enthusiastic activity until her preoccupation with their affairs made self-oblivion a habit. Their playfulness, and even their naughtinesses, engaged her interest; and their quaint sayings became her daily contribution to the amusement of the family. After the reopening of school, her spare time was devoted to the overflowing household of children living on one side of them, and to Mr. and Mrs. Yarrow, the aged couple living on the other side.

"Mother!" she shouted up the stairs one afternoon, "are you going to need me for an hour or so?"

"No. Why?"

"Because to-day is Mr. and Mrs. Yarrow's forty-eighth wedding anniversary, and the first anniversary they can't go out together to gather daisies. The whole house was trimmed with them at the wedding—the newspapers called it The Daisy Wedding. But now Mr. Yarrow's rheumatism makes it impossible for him to walk or ride to the fields. So I thought I'd surprise them with a lot. I can take all the little Hoffmans along."

"Oh, Babs," called Susie, now at home while Amy remained with Laura, "you never can manage with that tribe of unruly children!"

"They're not unruly," indignantly; "they're only lively, and no end of fun. And they will help with the picking."

"Go on," said her mother, "have your own fun in your own way, only don't go too far."

"I can't get used to this new fancy of Babs for children," said Susie. "It doesn't seem to fit in with any characteristic she ever showed before."

"I think it has grown out of her nursing under Doctor Hudson; that aroused her interest in all helpless things."

"Yes, Laura told me. Still, here am I, always fond of children, and yet I would not think of calling it 'fun' to go off with those mischievous little Hoffmans. I might feel it a duty, but 'fun'! How can she manage the baby if she has the other five?"

"Oh, she won't take the baby, of course."

"But, mother, she has taken it. There she goes trundling it along the street, and all the others cavorting around her like wild Indians."

Mrs. Morrison uttered an exclamation of dismay and threw up the window; but it was too late. Then she leaned back and laughed.

"Can you remember," answering Susie's questioning look, "that in the past we ever worried lest Barbara should overtax herself doing for others?"

Susie smiled too. "Now," continued her mother, "she is rapidly becoming one of the most useful members of the family. She doesn't even need telling what must be done; she sees it for herself. I don't



know what I would have done without her while Laura was ill." Here Susie interrupted with reproaches that she and Amy had been allowed to leave home at that time.

"You know, motherkins, we would a thousand times rather have stayed and helped than have been taking our selfish pleasure while the rest of you were carrying such a load."

"Yes, I know, and I knew at the time; but it was best all round. If you and Amy had been here, Laura would have had too many watching over her for her absolute relaxation, and Barbara would have lost the training. Indeed, it was the opportunity of her life. You and Amy were just where you were most needed, with poor lonely Aunt Amy. As for Babs, she has shown a willingness and ability little short of genius to fit into minor situations and to do needful odds and ends. While her interest in all these small doings glorifies them, I cannot be thankful enough to that Mrs. Barton for starting the chink-filling idea. I never before realized what it might be made to mean; but it is fast making the child indispensable to us and to many others, too."

Meanwhile Barbara and her band tramped along to the fields. When the small procession returned dusty, tired, and hungry, but merry still, and laden with daisies, Mrs. Hoffman met them at the door.

"Children, there's bread and milk on the kitchen table for you. Come right in, Barbara."

"Oh, I can't; I must take these daisies to Mrs. Yarrow."

"Not before you have a glass of lemonade."

So the girl perforce sat down, glad, after all, for a breathing space.

"You must be nearly dead. And I am afraid the children were horribly troublesome."

"Not a bit of it!" stoutly maintained their guardian; and then amid much laughter she told of their "monkey-shines."

"Well, I can't begin to tell you what it meant for me to know they were having a good time in safe hands. I had a splitting headache, but it gave me a chance to lie down, and now I'm all right. And so the blessed baby slept all the time, you say? and he hadn't slept a wink all day. You can tell your mother that I consider you an angel, Barbara Morrison."

Barbara laughed and blushed, and declared that then she was the sort of angel who knew mighty well how to give herself a good time. All the same, she did tell her mother, shyly watching for the effect of this extravagant praise, and was made very happy by the comment:

"I don't wonder you seemed an angel to her, poor, overworked mother that she is! You are the stalwart, practicable sort of angel that tired folk find much more comfortable to have about than the befeathered, white-robed ones of the paintings."

The Yarrows seemed to feel the same. And that evening Mrs. Morrison remarked to her husband:

"A little child shall lead them!"

"Apropos of what?" he asked.

"The way Barbara takes care of all the children of the neighborhood; and the way their companionship is moulding her into childlikeness of heart. It

begins to fairly glow in her face, and has wiped out all those lines of discontent and suspicion. Of all the ministrations that are straightening out our precious problem, none is more effective than the influence of the children—the child in the midst.”

“Excepting that of the mother in the midst,” he added tenderly, “who brings to bear from all sources every quickening and formative influence, and, without hampering their working, exercises unceasing vigilance over every step of the process, and then takes no credit to herself for the result.”



## CHAPTER XXI

### THE PERFECT LAW OF LIBERTY

**I**T was a Saturday afternoon. Patty had been put through the usual exercises with Barbara's tender aid. She had had her resting period while her friend watched in silence, and then, opening brightened eyes, she took from the stand a sheaf of papers.

"Here is the story I wanted to read to you—the story my father told—and that for me took the hardness out of what was happening."

### THE STORY HER FATHER TOLD PATTY

Once upon a time there was a Princess named Patricia Constantia; and just as she had two names, she had two natures. The Patricia part of her was proud, impetuous, and insubordinate; but also warm-hearted, courageous, and sincere. Constantia, on the contrary, was self-indulgent, sluggish, and vacillating; but was also conscientious, obedient, and gentle.

The King had ordained that the Princess should not be brought up at the Court, consequently she was placed with guardians who loved her very tenderly, and while they doubtless made many mistakes, since it is not easy to train a Patricia Constantia princess, they honestly strove their very best to follow the instructions of the King concerning her.

Most of the time the Princess was happy and care-free; although when Constantia overindulged her appetite for goodies, or Patricia raised her own special sort of riot, the Princess was certainly not happy, nor were her guardians care-free, and when the two natures of the Princess engaged in conflict with each other, matters within and without were in much the same state of fizz as if a teaspoonful of soda were dropped into a cupful of vinegar.

She lived in a beautiful and wonderful land, but nothing she saw interested her so much as the mountain directly in front of the door; for, as she had often been told, it was over this mountain that the pathway lay to her father's palace; and some day he would send a Messenger to tell her that the time had come when she must start on her journey to the Court. She could make out the beginnings of the pathway, but rocks and trees, and often clouds, hid the rest of it from her sight. Constantia was sure that it was a hard, tedious climb, and that never, never could she get to the top; so she named it the Mount of Endeavor. But Patricia's imagination leaped at once to the summit and the glories of the palace as viewed from it; so she called it the Mount of Achievement; for even before starting she seemed to see the pomp and pageant of her welcome at the King's Court.

The Princess sometimes wondered what sort of a Messenger would be sent. Patricia pictured him as a smiling herald, resplendent in gay velvets, jewels, and plumes, who would beg her, with courtly deference, to come with him; but Constantia feared he would be a fierce soldier in rattling armor, who would

drive her forward at the point of his spear. Therefore, the Princess was greatly surprised when, one day, a black-robed personage, with a stern, cold face, suddenly stood before her and beckoned her to follow, saying shortly: "This is the way; walk in it!" He strode forward up the pathway, and the Princess, too astonished to do otherwise, followed at his heels.

For a while she was so interested in watching her guide that she did not consider whether the climb were difficult or easy. But at last Constantia discovered that the way was stony and the sun hot, and started toward the grassy shade on one side.

"Turn not to the right hand nor to the left," said the voice ahead, and Constantia shrank back into the path; but Patricia, now aroused, retorted:

"I don't see any harm in walking where it is easy and pleasant."

The severe gaze was turned upon her, and the voice cold and indifferent said:

"My Master, the King, has proclaimed: 'This is the way; walk in it.'"

"Oh, if my Father the King has commanded it!" exclaimed Constantia in acquiescence.

"Yes," assented Patricia, "my Father the King I will obey, but no one else," and she glanced defiantly at the guide. He returned the glance with indifference as he answered:

"I am nothing at all but the King's Messenger. I have no thought, no word of my own. Every direction I give is only the Rule of the Road as he has commanded it. Whether you like or not what I say and do is nothing to me; but obey you must."

Patricia flushed angrily, but Constantia held her



fast, and whispered to her to be silent. Meanwhile their conductor was keeping onward, and the Princess had to hurry to catch up. The climb became steeper and rougher, and Constantia began to pant and sigh; but Patricia looked forward and thought she could almost see the summit; and was fired with eager ambition, so that she urged the Princess to even outstrip the guide, and that in spite of a restraining hand which he laid on her skirt as she passed him. She jerked it out of his fingers.

"No one shall check me in my obedience to my King!"

"It is only idle presumption," sternly remonstrated the King's Messenger, "to outrun his commands."

On sped the Princess under Patricia's compulsion; while Constantia, overpowered, begged and warned feebly, and then grew silent. The climb became steeper and steeper, and at last led up the rough side of a cliff. Still the Princess pressed upward until she stood on its top, and turned to call triumphantly to her guide:

"Behold what I have achieved!" But she paused in dismay. From this height she now saw that, without noticing it in her haste, she had been swerving to the left, and far beyond to her right beheld the black-robed figure calmly pursuing the beaten track. Against the breeze she faintly heard his admonition repeated:

"This is the way; walk ye in it!"

Crestfallen and frightened, she tried hastily to retrace her steps; but to descend the cliff was even more difficult than to ascend it. Her feet slipped and

down she fell, landing in a bed of briars and stinging nettles, bruised and shaken, and feeling as if every bone in her body were broken.

"Oh," wailed Constantia, "why did you, why did you try to be cleverer than your leader? I can never, never lift up my head again! I shall just lie here all the rest of my life!"

Patricia was too mortified to offer counsel or comfort. So the Princess lay where she had fallen, until a shadow came over her, and looking up she beheld her guide, gloomier and more forbidding than ever, and heard him say in his sternest voice:

"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall! He that is perverse in his ways shall fall! Like the Israelite, who against the commandment went to fight the Amalekites, you were presumptuous and went up the hill. Now return and walk as the King has ordered; for you have fallen through your own fault."

Slowly the Princess picked herself up, and with much pain and exertion, both on account of her bruises and the roughness of the short cut over rocks and through thickets, she followed the King's Messenger, who without pity kept urging forward her lagging footsteps. When she had regained the right path, she climbed on upward because she really did not dare to do otherwise. But Patricia and Constantia were both sullen and unwilling, the former because her pride hurt like a bruise, and the latter because her bruises hurt like pins and needles. The sky, too, looked stormy, and the gloom was so great that sometimes the Princess could not distinguish the dark robes of her leader. Tears ran from her

eyes, but quickly dried on the hot cheeks flushed with passion; and she sent such sharp glances of hatred ahead that it seemed as if they must have pierced through and through her leader's back. But he was as unconcerned over her hatred as over her distress, and made no pause for her weary, footsore steps.

However, when the sun at last shone out, the Princess brightened and forgot her troubles; and Patricia's courage revived, and even Constantia ceased her grumbling and began to use her conscientiousness to some purpose. Birds were singing and flowers blooming along the pathway, and on either side of it flowering bushes stretched away as far as the eye could see. Constantia herself acknowledged that the Mount of Endeavor had its advantages over the monotonous valley, and Patricia again began to fancy the summit just at hand, and all the promises of the Mount of Achievement fulfilled; when Constantia interrupted her day-dreams by a glad cry, and pointed to where the bushes opened out into a wide, turfy space, almost scarlet with a wealth of luscious ripe strawberries. Out of her recent experience Patricia would have restrained Constantia, and when she cried "Oh, aren't they delicious! Too tempting for words! Surely I might pick some of those close to the path. See, I can reach them in just one or two steps!" she stretched out a detaining hand; but at that instant the guide turned, and with a frown he sharply chided the Princess in the name of the King for even looking at the fruit. At that Patricia's wrath flared up:

"Come on, then; don't listen to the hateful fellow!" she cried. But now was Constantia's turn to hesi-



tate. "Perhaps we had better not," she faltered; "but oh, they do look so good, and I can't see where the harm would be in just taking one or two."

"No harm at all. He is simply trying to have his revenge. Come on!" So, more hastily than she had meant to, and therefore going farther than she had at first intended, the Princess turned aside and dropped on her knees among the spreading vines. Constantia "umhed" and "ahed" as she filled her mouth with the juicy berries, always, however, spying just a step or two beyond berries larger and riper. Suddenly the Princess was conscious that her feet were sinking into a black bog which the greenery had concealed; and also a sharp inward pang made her flinch. The berries were no longer sweet in her mouth, and even while she kept on tasting here and there, a disgust and sickness pervaded her whole being. She began, too, to notice the big slugs and slimy snails that crawled underneath the leaves; and suddenly she heard a sharp hissing, and an angry serpent reared its head just where her outstretched hand was descending, and its red tongue waved like a flashing flame. With a scream the Princess sprang for the path, but could not see a vestige of it. Unconsciously in her absorption she had wandered in a devious way, and now did not know to which side to turn. She essayed to run, but her feet kept sinking in the bog until the black waters oozed up to her ankles; the trees, too, began to close in and cast dark shadows, and every once in a while a warning rattle made her aware that these hideous snakes had their dens close by; and the terror of it made her cold, and her limbs grew heavy as lead.

She could never tell how, at last, frantic with fright, sick and sore in every part, and trembling with despair and fatigue, she regained the path and the now welcome company of her guide—welcome even though he looked more severe and implacable than ever. He seized her and shook her until her teeth fairly chattered.

“Did I not forbid it? Am not I acting in the name of the King?”

The Princess dropped on her poor, tired, stained and thorn-scratched knees and begged for mercy.

“Mercy? I can show no mercy; I can only show you the way and command you to follow the King’s Rule of the Road; and warn you to beware that he does not turn you out of his presence at last as no daughter of his, but an ingrate and a rebel.” And he turned again with the one inexorable command: “Follow!”

The Princess crept after, chilled to the bone with apprehension and the iciness of her wet, clinging skirts, almost too sick to move, her head so aching and dizzy that she could hardly see where to place her steps, her dress covered with mud and fruit-stains and hanging in rags about her. Her feet staggered so that she often found them out of the beaten track, and every step became harder than the one before. At last, close beside her, she saw a soft green mound of thick moss.

“I can’t go any farther!” sobbed Constantia.

“I won’t go any farther!” exploded Patricia.

“Oh, let me lie down and rest here!” cried the Princess. But the guide only repeated menacingly: “Follow!”

In a perfect fury Patricia stormed that not another step would she take. Under her influence the Princess stamped her foot in rage and shrieked:

"You shall not browbeat me thus! I tell you I am the *Princess!* Who are you that you dare lord it over me in this way?"

"I," he replied, as firm as adamant, "am the King's Messenger, sent to make you walk in the King's highway, according to the King's commands, under threat of the King's decree of banishment if you walk a hair's-breadth out of it!"

"I don't believe you!" the Princess vociferated, infuriated beyond bounds. "You are an impostor and no Messenger. The King is my father, and surely I ought to know what he wants me to do! He loves me and wants me to be happy, and to enjoy all the good things he has provided for my pleasure! I will *not* follow you another step! I hate you more than words can express; and I condemn and defy you! What is your name that I may denounce you to the King, my father?"

Even as she uttered these bold words she trembled inwardly at his aspect. His eyes flashed lightning and he drew from under his robe a whip, saying:

"My name is The Law of Duty, and they who will not follow shall be driven."

"Will he dare?" wondered the still defiant Princess.

And then a strange thing happened; for even while she regarded him a change came over his face. It broke into a smile of rapturous love and delight as he gazed up the path toward which her back was turned, and sank on his knees in obeisance. The startled Princess turned to see what could have



wrought this miraculous change. There above them stood One in clothes poverty-stricken, but of a shining whiteness. Blood drops were on His brow, and blood was on His wounded hands and feet. His face was wan, and its deep lines bespoke long-borne sorrow and sharp anguish of soul, and His shoulders were bowed as with a heavy burden. His eyes fastened upon the Princess with the warm light of an infinite love that shook her proud spirit to its centre.

"Who is He?" she whispered, and The Law of Duty replied in a voice of exulting adoration:

"He is your Brother, the Prince, the well-beloved Son of the King."

The Princess shrank with shame, and covered her blushing face with her hands as she realized that all her clothing was filthy rags, and that the Prince not only saw this, but must also have heard the presumptuous, rebellious words she had spoken to the King's Messenger. But the well-beloved Son of the King was speaking, and she held her breath to listen:

"The Law was but the schoolmaster to bring you to Me; but now that I am come, you are no longer under bondage to a schoolmaster. If, therefore, the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed. Come unto Me. Take *My* yoke upon you and learn of Me. For *My* yoke is easy and *My* burden is light; and apart from Me you can do nothing."

She looked up, and, blinded as were her eyes with tears, she was sure the wounded hands were held out in invitation. And as she gazed a voiceless pleading stirred the depths of her heart.

"Will you walk the pathway with Me, dear one? It is the one road that leads to the King's palace. I

have been over every step of it, and My feet have been sore wearied and hurt with the length and roughness of it. Yea, and with infinite suffering I have cleared the way of its worst obstructions and have overcome fierce beasts and fiercer enemies that beset it. Such was the King's decree out of tender love for His children; and My love was so great that I flew to do His bidding. I may not save your feet from the sharp flints, nor may I keep them from wearying; but you will find partaking in My suffering sweet to your soul.

"If you *will* to walk with Me, I shall never, never forsake you, or leave you comfortless, or unguided. When you are faint, I shall uphold you; when your heart fails with fear, I shall be a protecting wall about you; when the darkness falls, I shall hold your hand, and in My light shall you see light. But if you come, dear one, it must be altogether and entirely your own choice. Can you trust Me to be and to do all that I promise? Can you make up your mind to walk with Me as I shall walk with you to the very end? Will you come to Me, beloved?"

Patty stopped, and Barbara almost whispered the question:

"What did the Princess say?"

"That is what I asked father when he stopped right there; and he smiled his tender, beaming smile upon me—oh, I am sure that it was like the smile of the Prince—and asked: 'What *did* she say, my child?'"

"And you answered?" queried Barbara.

"I laid my head on the pillow beside his and whispered: 'Yes, I will walk the way to the end with you,

my Brother and my Prince.' And father placed his hand softly on my cheek and went on: 'And the Prince smiled upon her and said: "Now are you made free from the Law of sin and death. Now are you under the perfect Law of Liberty." And when the Princess looked for her former guide as she stepped forward beside her Brother, she saw his dark robes disappearing by another and a thornier way.'"

The two girls sat silent for a moment or two until Patty turned and asked softly:

"What would you have answered, Barbara?"

"Yes, oh yes, a thousand times I will!" said Barbara swiftly.

Just then the doctor's horn sounded without, and they separated with one happy, understanding gaze into each other's eyes.

"Did you good, didn't she?" The doctor had been furtively studying his girlish chauffeur's face for a mile or two when he startled her with this inquiry.

"Who did me good? Oh, you mean Patty. Yes, indeed, she always does." Then hesitatingly: "Doctor, doesn't the *Law of Liberty* sound like a contradiction in terms?"

"Better a contradiction in terms than a contradiction in facts."

"You mean by that——?"

"That the facts of one's condition are the important matters; the terms in which one states them may be quite negligible."

"Yes, but then the terms ought to have some sort of relation to the facts, oughtn't they? When they flatly contradict each other, doesn't it make nonsense?"



"Nonsense in this case has the most blessed sort of meaning."

"Well, then, doctor, how would you express the meaning of the *Law of Liberty*?"

"I should say that it meant a right to do whatever one pleased; because one pleased to do only what it was right to do."

"Oh, I do like that!" and Barbara eagerly turned toward him.

"Now, now, now!" he warned, "remember the ditch!"

So they both sat silent until she stopped the car at the corner of her own street, where he was in the habit of dropping her out. She paused on the curb a moment to say earnestly:

"*You* always do me a lot of good, too, doctor."

He flushed with the warmth that the words brought to his rugged heart.

"There, there, you are planning to make me proud of you, too, are you?"

But Barbara saw the twinkling smile in his eye and cared no more for his growl than did Laura. On she went homeward with springy, glad steps. "At liberty, at liberty!" the song of her heart.

"I will follow my Brother the Prince because it is my own choice, and no matter what the hard place He leads me through, they too shall be my choice because *He* leads!"

Ahead of her she saw toiling up the ascent a figure so bowed and with such a laggard gait that she did not at first recognize it for her father. When she did, she ran to him impetuously, and fairly danced around him as she cried:

"Oh, father dear, I have just been introduced to the Law of Liberty; and would you believe it? by that dear old bear of a Doctor Hudson! Tell me—you know such a lot about law—is his definition right?" and she repeated it. Her father said it over slowly, and then pronounced it sufficiently accurate for a working proposition.

"Then," and she whirled about on her toes, "I am going to work it. I have always wanted to have my own way, and it has always brought me bang up against a stone wall; but now I've found out how to manage."

"Some one has expressed it somewhat on this wise," her father said:

"If what *is*, you will not; still  
This yet remains—*what is to will.*"

And he straightened up and trod more firmly, as if merely quoting the words had refreshed him.

## CHAPTER XXII

BLESSINGS, LIKE CHICKENS, COME HOME TO ROOST.  
DOCTOR SARGEANT DEVELOPS A CRISIS

**D**URING that winter and the early spring there were many encouraging ups, but also discouraging downs, when Barbara declared that everything went "cutering-corner-wise as if possessed." However, her family and friends knew that whatever her downfalls, they were all on an increasingly higher plane than they had ever been before; and Mark cheered her with the doggerel paraphrase:

"As Babs went tumbling up the hill  
To win a crown of glory,  
Mark thought: 'That sort of tumbling will  
Improve my own life-story.'  
So while the Kiddie from each fall  
Rose up with cheerful laughter,  
In spite of bumps and bruises all,  
See Mark come tumbling after."

Laura was now fully restored; Patty had improved until it had become possible to take her, at long intervals, for very short and slow rides in the doctor's car; Barbara was studying so diligently that it was not easy for her to do much else, except the small helpfulnesses which, though they took but little thought and little time, had a double value both for herself and for those who received them. They taught her



that even a life full of pressing duties has its leisure chances for kindnesses, and that that was why women like her mother could compass all demands. Meanwhile Barbara's activities proved to others that her chink-filling had become a permanent and a valuable scheme of life.

Doctor Sargeant was still her aversion, and the only time she enjoyed him was when he was telling of the cripple boy's success. Laura now played his violin accompaniment, but Barbara's most critical watchfulness could discover nothing more than musical sympathy between them.

With considerable elation she stated this to Mark.

"Mark, he doesn't begin to run after Laura as much as he does after you."

"See here, sis, you are still too young to understand the subtlety of a young man's conduct; but take my word for it, when a prize like Laura is in view, a fellow is bound to capture all the relatives and set them to working for him."

"Mark, you surely wouldn't work for *him*?"

"He's a nice fellow, Babs."

"But, Mark, to dare to think of carrying Laura away from us off to China!"

"Fiendish, I know, but perhaps the Chinese need her even more than we do."

"Never, never, *never*! And what is to become of her music in that dreadful land?"

"Why, Laura can cheer them up with it while Bob cuts off arms and legs."

Barbara meditated a while, and then vigorously:

"Well, I should consider it audaciously wicked of him to even contemplate such a thing as carrying

Laura off, but I don't believe the idea has ever entered his head. Anyway, I shall do all I can to keep her here."

Mark looked at her quizzically.

"What you say, my dear child, is exactly as clear as mud. But if it means that you intend to sweep out the ocean with your little broom, you will find you have a big business on your hands, of which I wish you more joy than you are likely to get."

At the approach of the Easter vacation her mother told Barbara that she was to go with Laura to Elm Tree Hill, "for the good time, darling, you have certainly earned. Laura says she wants to do something to reward you for your long kindness to her."

They had been there several days when Laura said:

"If you don't mind going alone to the post-office with these letters, I can be ready by the time you get back to take you to the Hidden Glen. I do believe it is the loveliest spot ever created, but I wanted to wait for just the right sort of a day to show it to you."

Off Barbara started down the country road blithely singing. Ahead of her a small "runabout" had just stopped before a cottage gate, and the chauffeur was hurrying toward the barn. He had barely turned the corner of the house when the car began to move slowly down the slight embankment. The lady within hastily flung the door open and tried to jump; but either her skirt caught or the motion unbalanced her, for she fell face downward at full length in the road, and the rear wheel pinned both ankles underneath it. Barbara ran forward, calling:

"Don't struggle! I'll lift it off of you!"

Then, as there was no response or movement, she exclaimed:

"Mercy, suppose she has broken her neck with just a little fall like that!" and she sprang for the toolbox and, thanks to her drilling under Doctor Hudson, soon had the car jacked up, but only to find that she was not strong enough to move the prostrate figure. At this instant a touring-car stopped beside her, and two gentlemen sprang out. Gently they turned the unconscious woman over and laid her on the grass; and then to her horror, dirty and blood-stained as it was, Barbara recognized the face of Mrs. Barton.

"Oh, is she dead? Is she dead? Do you think she can be dead?" cried she in a desperate fear. But immediately her nursing instinct resumed sway, and she soon convinced herself to the contrary.

As if by magic, a small crowd had gathered, other cars had stopped, the people from the house came running out, and the chauffeur stood by stupid with fright. All the rest were only too active, closing around so as to exclude the air, asking what had happened, and how it happened, offering advice and generally hindering.

"Oh," said Barbara desperately, "can't we get her out of this? Do, *do* keep back! Where is a doctor that we can carry her to?"

But already one of the gentlemen had interviewed the butcher boy, who was delighted to hand his bicycle with the delivery basket over to another boy while he undertook to go in the car with them and show them the way.

"Why, sure," he said, "I know her; she's Doctor



Whitcomb's sister what's staying with him. Didn't I take her order this very morning."

So Mrs. Barton was lifted into the touring-car, where, with the aid of one of the gentlemen, Barbara supported her; and they shot forward, but not before the chauffeur had been startled out of his daze by the sharp command to bring the runabout along double quick, "and the next time you put your brake on, *put it on!*"

"I tell you," warmly exclaimed the gentleman assisting Barbara, "you're a crackerjack with a car. Why, dad and I had only stopped to ask our way when we saw there was trouble ahead, and speeded up for all we were worth; but you had that car yanked up in a jiffy! Couldn't have done better myself, and *I'm* some joker with a machine, I can tell you! How'd you learn?"

Barbara for the first time took notice of him and discovered that, after all, he was only what she called "a big boy," about eighteen or nineteen, and answered rather shortly that their doctor had taught her.

"Well, he's some teacher, then! What make was his?" and question followed question before she could answer.

"Oh, do stop talking!" she unceremoniously ordered. "Can't you see that I'm nearly distracted? What do I care about cars and things? If Mrs. Barton dies of this fall, it will just kill me too! She is perfectly adorable!"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," and he looked thoroughly penitent. "It was confounded of me, but I didn't know the lady was your mother."

“But she isn’t my mother. What a ridiculous idea!”

Whereat he said with spirit, being considerably nettled by the snub:

“Well, *I* should consider it the rankest disloyalty to call any woman but my mother ‘adorable’!”

Barbara scanned the flushed, freckled face in front of her, and then answered frankly:

“I am sure my mother is adorable if ever a mother was, but she, too, would think this dear lady adorable,” and she tenderly lifted a strand of hair that had blown across the still face, and softly added, while tears stood in her eyes and her lips trembled:

“I never saw her but once before in my life, and then, though I was nothing in the world to her, and didn’t deserve it, she gave me heavenly, eternal help.”

Barbara’s adjectives were apt to be high-flown and ill assorted, but this time they reached the inner truth, and when later the young fellow was telling of the adventure, he said:

“From the look of her face, mother, when she said that, I’d wager my hat she’s *good*!”

The doctor was waiting on the steps to receive them, and between them they soon had Mrs. Barton on her bed, and while the gentlemen went below to await the report, Barbara helped the brother with his hasty preliminary examination and efforts at revival.

When at last Mrs. Barton opened her eyes, she exclaimed:

“Such a dreadful fall, Tom,” and then seeing Barbara: “Why, Barbara Morrison, how nice!” followed by the cry of distress: “Oh, Tom, Tom, my head!”

Do give me something; the agony will drive me mad! Quick, Tom dear, quick!"

But he begged her to be patient a little longer till he could discover just how much she was hurt; and then, having satisfied himself that no bones were broken, and that it would do to administer a sedative, he anxiously asked Barbara if, with the help of the frightened little country maid who had been hovering around, she could get his sister comfortably in bed. At her ready assent he looked relieved, and left the room. When he returned, it was with a clouded brow.

"Your friends are waiting to take you home."

"My friends? Oh, those gentlemen! No, they are strangers who picked us up. Can't I stay and take care of Mrs. Barton? Please, doctor, I will do exactly as you tell me to. Doctor Hudson taught me that that was a nurse's first duty."

His face cleared again.

"I cannot tell you how grateful I shall be if you can stay. My wife is at Amherst, looking after our sick boy, and my sister had come to look after me, and now needs looking after herself; but there is so much illness about that I don't know of a soul I can call upon to help. You take hold as if you had been brought up to it; it is astonishing in so young a person. I have an almost dying patient whom I was starting to visit, and if you can manage this situation with Sarah to wait on you, I will telephone to the city for a nurse, make a few imperative calls, and get back as soon as possible." Then he turned back at the open door: "By the way, the gentleman said you dropped some letters, and asks if he shall mail them?"



"Oh, yes; I entirely forgot them, and one was to mother." And then she bethought her of Laura's probable anxiety, and asked him to notify her.

About an hour later the little maid introduced Laura to the door of the darkened room.

"Babs, dear, this is dreadful to have your belated holiday broken into in this way! I don't see how I can allow you to stay."

"If you could know, Laura, how thankful I am, what a blessing I consider it to have this chance to do for Mrs. Barton, you wouldn't utter a whisper against it." And she explained the doctor's dilemma, until finally Laura acquiesced, and went back to get a suitcase ready for Barbara, saying as she left:

"Those two gentlemen brought me the doctor's message, and they said such lovely things about you, Babs, love, especially the young man."

"Yes, he was the youngest fellow for his size I ever saw, and had the reddest hair," assented the girl, unimpressed.

"No, dear, his father had the red hair; the son's was brown."

"Oh, was it? Well, anyway, he's frightfully immature and deadly uninteresting!"

Laura, though still anxious at heart, had withdrawn with smiling lips, for when Barbara wore this indifferent air of extreme aloofness and advanced years, her family found her irresistibly comical.

Doctor Whitcomb returned in much perturbation, for no nurse could be sent before the next morning; but her face brightened:

"If only you think I will do, I shall be perfectly delighted to stay. My sister was here and is going

to bring things for me. Please say I may stay. Your sister was, oh, so good to me once when I was a horrid old thing, and I've always longed to do something for her to prove that her efforts weren't wasted!"

For the first time he smiled, and said kindly:

"You don't look as if you ever were 'a horrid old thing.' It will be worth everything to her, and to me, if you will stay. I shall have to go out again, and I can't leave Nettie to Sarah."

And so it was arranged. When Mrs. Barton awoke she was fully herself, but in much pain with a badly cut mouth, a wildly aching head, and a sense of general dislocation. She scouted the idea of needing a nurse, but finally yielded to her brother's representations. However, through some misunderstanding, no nurse came, and it finally resulted in Barbara remaining for two or three days longer, when, although still lame and shaky, Mrs. Barton could safely be left.

"What a happy day that was for me when I found you behind the station door, my chink-filling nurse. How could we have done without you? Doctor says you took hold like a regular Red Cross veteran. And you have ministered comfort untold and untellable to my poor bruised body, and have proved yourself an ideal sort of blessing."

Barbara beamed with joy at these words, and even more at the affectionate touch and look which accompanied them.

"It's just your own blessing that you gave me that day coming back to you."

"Then it has come back with compound interest. I'm in the case of the old lady who said that she had cast her bread upon the water, and it came back to

her cake. Now listen to me: this summer you are to make me a long visit at my summer home in Dorset, Vermont. I go there every year."

Barbara gasped with rapture, for those three days with Mrs. Barton, even though the chats had to be brief on account of the lady's pain, had fastened forever the chains of a passionately romantic attachment. She was still trying to express her blissful gratitude when Sarah announced that a gentleman was waiting to carry Miss Morrison's dress-suit case for her.

"A gentleman," repeated Barbara in amazement. "Oh, perhaps Mark has come up for the week-end; he said he might."

Then she sank on her knees beside the bed, clasped Mrs. Barton's hand in hers, and whispered:

"Dear Lady Delight, there isn't a thing in the world I wouldn't do, dare, and suffer for you; so please love me a little mite, though really I'm not a bit worth it."

Mrs. Barton's laugh winked away the tears in her eyes as she felt the girl's kisses on her hand, and drew her face to her own.

"There, there, I think, with your mother's kind consent, we shall long be loving friends."

It was a very radiant Barbara who ran down the stairs to meet the expected Mark, but far less radiant when she found Doctor Sargeant instead of Mark standing at the door chatting with Mrs. Barton's brother. She would have been glad to have rejected his escort, but the presence of Doctor Whitcomb restrained her. The latter held out his hand as he said cordially:



"I cannot sufficiently express my gratitude to you. You have, indeed, been a godsend to us. Believe me, it is not flattery when I say that you have unusual ability as a nurse, and should you ever become a professional, I shall certainly recommend you far and wide."

"Yes," said Sargeant, "Miss Barbara is all right, with one exception."

Doctor Whitcomb smiled at her astonished and rather indignant face as he said kindly:

"Oh, come now, I don't believe in that one exception. What is it?"

"Only that she doesn't like me," answered the other in mock grief.

"Then see that you make her like you."

"Just what I'm going to do," asserted he confidently; but Doctor Whitcomb thought that Barbara's eyes said otherwise.

They had walked together in silence through the village, but when they reached the lane leading between fields to the boarding-house, Sargeant said:

"Laura told me she would give me just so much time as it took us to reach the house to make you like me. You see, it is essential that you should like me, now that I am going to be your brother."

"What?" fairly shrieked she, standing stock-still. And then: "Oh, no, no, it can't be! Never, never! Laura mustn't. We can't let her be a missionary!" And she started on a run toward the house. Sargeant dropped the suitcase and caught her by the arm.

"Now, listen," he said, and then and there, to his own surprise, he preached the most eloquent of missionary sermons. The words came of themselves,

and his surprise grew as he found himself telling this defiant, antagonistic girl the innermost thoughts of his heart, such as he had revealed to no one but his mother, and more recently to Laura. He was much like Barbara herself in preferring to assume a cloak of brusquerie to allowing his tenderer thoughts to become known; but now out of the fulness of the heart his mouth spoke of his love for Jesus, his longing that souls might be won to Him, and the pressing needs of the congested millions of China.

Gradually Barbara's face softened, and she gently loosened his fingers from her arm, saying:

"You needn't hold me. I won't run away till you have said all you want to."

When he had finished, her face was as flushed with feeling as his own.

"I shall never dislike you again," she said emphatically. "I never really knew you before, and now I think I do. I agree with you that you are, as some put it, 'especially called' to be a missionary, and I'm sure that we shall all glory in your success and be proud and glad to have known you. But your going is no reason at all for Laura's going, and I shall fight that with all my might and main. She simply *shall not go* if I can prevent it."

Then over the suitcase between them began a hot discussion. Sargeant thought he already knew all the objections that could be urged against foreign missions, but he now heard more, more ingenious, and it must also be confessed, more unfair and distorted arguments than he had ever conceived it possible the ingenuity of the human mind could invent. They both became warm and breathless with their

rapid give and take, and instead of gaining any ground with Barbara, her dogged stubbornness of opposition only increased. At last in desperation he suddenly changed from the defensive to the offensive, and carrying the war into the enemy's country, declared his firm conviction that she ought to prepare and herself go as a missionary trained nurse. He pressed his point while she listened intently to his amplifications on the need for missionary nurses, and the vast field for usefulness open to them through their intimate association with native women and children in such kindly ministrations as would give them the greatest influence over grateful hearts. Barbara stood with downcast eyes carefully pressing circles and daisies in the mud with the toe of her boot. But when he had finished, the eyes were very ardent that she lifted to his face, and he was almost staggered at the promptness of her surrender as she said simply:

"I think perhaps you are right, and that I ought to go."

"Whew!" he said, "what would your mother say and your father?"

"Oh, that will be all right," answered she calmly, "and, besides, it wouldn't be lonely for me with Laura there too."

"There," he cried triumphantly, "I had a suspicion all along that it was, after all, only selfishness—just because you didn't want to do without her—that made you determined Laura shouldn't go."

She turned and looked at him a startled moment, and then said thoughtfully:

"Perhaps you are right, for I don't feel at all the same opposition now that I think I may not be sepa-



rated from her. I wonder how you happen to be so keen to read my faults?" and she again looked at him, but this time with frankly troubled eyes. A wave of compassion came over Sargeant for this impulsive, impetuous young thing, with her snap-shot judgments and decisions, which were bound to land her only too often in many and grave difficulties; and as he picked up the suitcase and turned to continue their walk, he placed his arm affectionately around her and said:

"Then you will consent to be my loving little sister. If you but knew how I have longed for a sister! And how I have envied Mark!"

Barbara, in considerable embarrassment, gave the grudging reply:

"Why, I suppose if Laura is really going to be so foolish as to throw herself away on you, I shall have to consent to accept you as a brother."

He saw Laura coming smilingly to meet them, and said teasingly:

"Then seal this wonderfully affectionate consent by a sisterly kiss."

"A kiss? Indeed I won't, not till I know what sort of a brother you are going to make."

And, breaking away, she fled to Laura. She could not but see even in her haste and excitement that her sister's face had a new womanliness and beauty, so she gave her a stormy hug and kiss, and in still more stormy tears fled to her room.

Later, though, she and Laura had a talk most satisfactory to both.

"If you love me one mite less—" it began in threatening tones on Barbara's part.

"I shan't," interrupted the other; "on the contrary, I shall love you very much more; how can I help it when Bob keeps singing your praises."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Babs derisively. "That is because he thinks it will win favor with you."

Then she went on to tell of the suggestion regarding missionary nursing, but was confounded by her sister's dismay and distress.

"Oh, Bob should never have put such an idea into your head. Why, Babs, mother couldn't possibly get along without you, nor father either."

"Silly, silly! I'm no special use at home; I only do the little things that any one else could do."

"Yes, but that no one else does do. You only trot, trot on all sorts of errands, watch out for each one's comfort, keep us all enlivened with your fun and stimulated with your earnestness——"

"And in hot water with my bungles and scrapes!" still derided Barbara.

But Laura caught her and hugged her.

"You shan't say a word against my Babs—the dearest of sisters and the most diligent and successful of chink-fillers!"

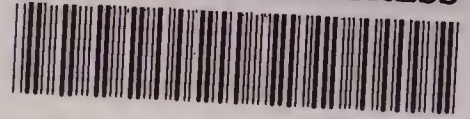








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